Where do the best riders come from? 5 of Canada's top spots **Nutrition** Going faster with caffeine

CANADIAN Cycling MAGAZINE

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

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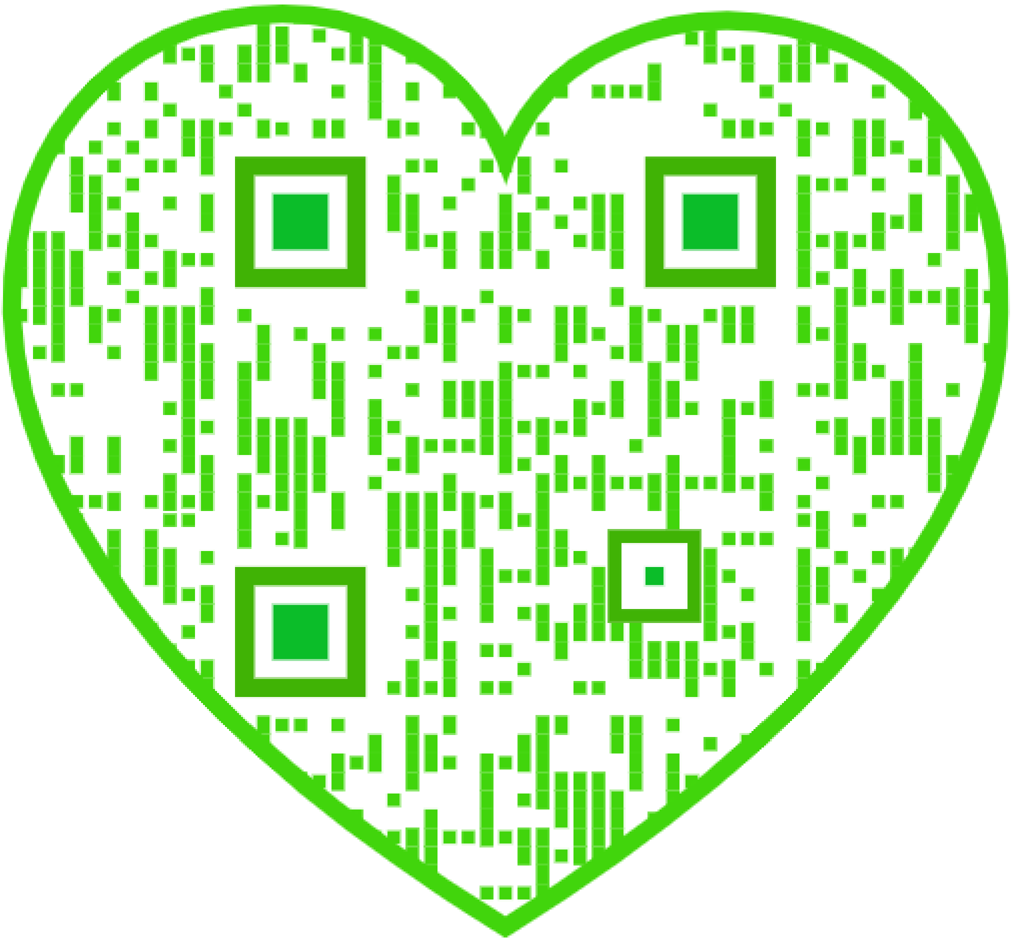
AEOLUS

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FINDING THE RIGHT BIKE AND GEAR FOR YOU

PLUS

CANADIAN WINS PRO CONTRACT AT ZWIFT ACADEMY

CHRIS DEKERF VANCOUVER'S PIONEERING FRAME BUILDER



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What is it that drives someone to greatness? To take on the unknown, venture into the unseen, and dare all? This is the spirit that gave birth to TUDOR, a spirit carried forward by every individual who wears this watch. This is the spirit that drives the **TUDOR Pro Cycling Team**. On their wrists is the TUDOR Pelagos FXD Chrono, a 43mm diameter sports chronograph boldly combining carbon and titanium. Light, just like their bikes. Some are born to follow. Others are born to dare.

BORN TO DARE

CONTENTS

VOL. 16, ISSUE 2

FEATURES

26 These Five Communities Make Canada's Top Riders
Riding local, going global
Overcoming many challenges, these regions have found ways to foster athletes who can succeed abroad
by Jeff Bartlett

34 Vancouver's Master Mountain Bike Craftsman
From MTB's early days to modern classics
For more than 30 years, Chris Dekerf has been building frames and components that not only push his skills to new heights, but take bike design into new directions
by Robin Black

40 Essential Advice for Buying a New Bike and Components
What you need to know before you head out to the shop
Tips for picking the right road, gravel, mountain or ebike for you, as well the right accessories
by Molly Hurford

2 **Editor's Letter**
4 **Gallery**
6 **News**
7 **Vintage Velo**
47 **Gear**
88 **Q&A**

Photo: Paul Skilbeck/HBG

THE SCENE

8 The New Math for Cyclists
Advanced number-crunching can lead you to the gear, and financial figures, that will make you happy

10 Watopia to WorldTour Shot
Canada's next road superstar is an elite mountain biker?

12 Cycling and the Law
How to prevent the dreaded door prize

13 Canadian Club
Adventure Biking Project takes young riders to the trails, and beyond

14 Nutrition
How to make sure caffeine helps, and doesn't hinder, your rides

16 48 Hours
Bikepacking In Victoria's backyard

TRAINING

20 Training Tips
Coaching tips for cycling moms

22 Technique
Win your town-sign sprints with advice from Kaden Groves

24 Maintenance
How to get your bike steering smoothly

DESTINATION

84 The Gravel Routes of Lapland Under the Northern Lights
North of the Arctic Circle is a playground of mix-surface riding

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

ROAD & GRAVEL

48 **Road Racing**
50 **All-Road**
51 **Road Price Point**
52 **Gravel Race**
53 **Gravel Adventure**
54 **Gravel Price Point**
56 **eRoad and eGravel**
57 **eCommuter and eCargo**
58 **Road Wheels**
60 **Gravel Wheels**
62 **Road Tires**
63 **Gravel Tires**

TRAIL

64 **MTB Dream Machines**
66 **MTB Performance**
68 **MTB Price Point**
70 **eMTB**
71 **Fat Bikes**
72 **Mountain Bike Wheels**
74 **Mountain Bike Tires**

RAPID FIRE

75 **Mountain Bike Shoes**
76 **Gravel Shoes**
77 **MTB and Gravel Pedals**
78 **Road Shoes**
79 **Road Pedals**
80 **Saddles**
81 **Bike Computers**
82 **Dropper Posts**
83 **MTB Forks**

ON THE COVER

The Trek **Madone SLR 9** is the latest top-end road racing machine by the Waterloo, Wisc.-based company. The eighth-generation of Trek's aero bike keeps the wind-cheating abilities of the previous model, while sporting a similar weight to the company's old climbing bike, Émonda. In fact, with the release of this Madone, the carbon-fibre Émonda line came to an end. The bike on our cover not only features Trek's premium composite formula, 900 Series OCLV Carbon, but its top-of-the-line paint. Here, you see the shiny Icon Interstellar finish. Truly a dream machine. For more information, head to p.48.

Photo: Matt Stetson

EDITOR'S LETTER

Crashing a Bike That's Not Yours

One of the most stressful things that can happen while testing a new machine

My kid is always appalled when I say, "But, don't worry, the bike's OK," after I come home from a ride scratched up. The kid is perpetually annoyed by this routine that I, that many of us, perform: after a crash, we show more concern about our bikes than ourselves. My child, ever the sensible one with a strong sense of right and wrong (which I love about them), is repelled by the idea of putting the well-being of an object above that of a person. Of course, there's no arguing that a person is more important than a bike, but the reversal is what makes the dark humour work when a rider says, "I have Tegaderm on my hip, but the bike's OK."

But, holy cow, crashing a bike can be stressful, especially when it's not yours.

I appreciate every person who's ever sent *Canadian Cycling Magazine* a bike to test, and who will do so in the future, whether directly to me or to any other of the magazine's reviewers. That person trusts us with a machine that's valued at thousands of dollars. In 2024, for the first time, I was swapping between two bikes that were each more than $20,000. While my reviewers and I all look at test bikes dispassionately and critically, we all respect the machines, and time and work that goes into creating them. All these factors make a test-bike crash so fraught.

Once, when I pulled a test bike out of its box, I noticed a chip on the top tube. It came pre-nicked, if you will. I snapped a photo of it and sent it to the brand. The response: "Thanks for the heads-up on the ding. A clear sign of a marketing demo. Hahaha." (That is the exact quote. I pasted it from the original email.) Clearly, many brands, especially the bigger ones, are prepared to see some wear and scuffs on their test bikes. But smaller outfits, or lone Canadian reps, can't afford to have their bikes bashed up.

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> "Thanks for the heads-up on the ding. A clear sign of a marketing demo. Hahaha."

This past summer, I crashed while riding one of the bikes that's in this issue's buyer's guide. I was on a local trail. Everything was overgrown; grass and weeds covered the singletrack. I hit a deep wheel-stopping hole. In an instant, I was on the ground. It was so fast and so hard that I actually didn't worry about the bike at first. The split-second diagnostics went from head (concussion? don't think so, but monitor), to body (anything broken? bleeding? nope) to bike (as soon as I can get up, I'll check). I collected myself, and then the machine. Oh, yes! Not a scratch. Even better—there was no concussion. I thanked the Ekoi Stradale helmet for its service. I was so rattled, though, that I never made any jokes about that crash with my kid.

This issue's buyer's guide is an annual tradition. It lands just as the outdoor riding season gets going in some parts of the country and is tantalizingly close to starting in others. For me, its release means it's now time to start testing bikes on roads and trails. Testing diligently, and making sure everything is OK.

Matthew Pioro
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GALLERY

John Gibson

Ridge riding in the Canadian Rockies

Rafaelle Carrier wins bronze in the junior women's race at the UCI world cyclocross championships

From a world championship podium to juggling school and later a new discipline

Three days after taking bronze at the world cyclocross championships, having spent a little more than two months racing in Europe, Rafaelle Carrier was back at home in Lac-Beauport, Que. The junior racer then switched to something that was possibly more gruelling than the muddy courses she had been facing. She had a lot of catching up to do in school: final exams from the previous semester of CEGEP as well as work from the first week of the new session that had started while she was doing her final preparation for the junior CX race in Liévin, France. A snow day in mid-February brought some respite and a chance to look back at the cyclocross season that had recently concluded.

"I had won the junior women's World Cup overall and a couple of World Cup races," she said. "So, I knew I had a chance of winning the world championships. But, I think I was just getting a bit tired. It was a long season, so I didn't have my best race. I'm still really proud because the podium spot at worlds is still a really good accomplishment." Carrier's long season also included a second-place finish at the junior cross country world championships in August.

The year ahead was already looking busy: early spring races, Pan Ams, Canada Cups, XC nationals and the cross country world championships once again. After all that mountain bike racing, which is Carrier's favourite discipline, she'll take to the roads of Europe as a stagiaire on Arkéa-B&B Hotels Women. Could a road career be in the works? "I'll see if I like it," Carrier said, "and then I'll see if I really want to race on the road or continue mountain biking."

Could Adelaide, Australia, be cursed?

One of the first calls Sarah Van Dam made after having her collarbone broken while riding in Adelaide, Australia, was to another rider, who, like Van Dam, is from Victoria, and who also broke her collarbone in Adelaide. A motor vehicle's side mirror clipped Van Dam as she was out on a training ride following the Tour Down Under, in which she was third in the points competition. While Van Dam didn't hit the deck, she did suffer a break. The injury happened almost a year after her national team pursuit colleague, Erin Attwell, crashed ahead of the 2024 Nations Cup in Adelaide.

"Erin is a good friend to talk to because she knows what it's like to break a bone on the other side of the world and then travel home," said Van Dam in mid-February from her place in Girona. "It's not the easiest process." Van Dam also had the full support of her team, Ceratizit Pro Cycling, which sent her a trainer. Despite the break, Van Dam was still able to reach forward and grip the bars of her trainer-mounted bike. She did, however, need to raise the bars slightly, providing her with more stack than her standard race fit. She was on the mend. Things were going well. "Still, it's a bit hard riding the trainer when there's sunny weather in Girona, but it could be worse."

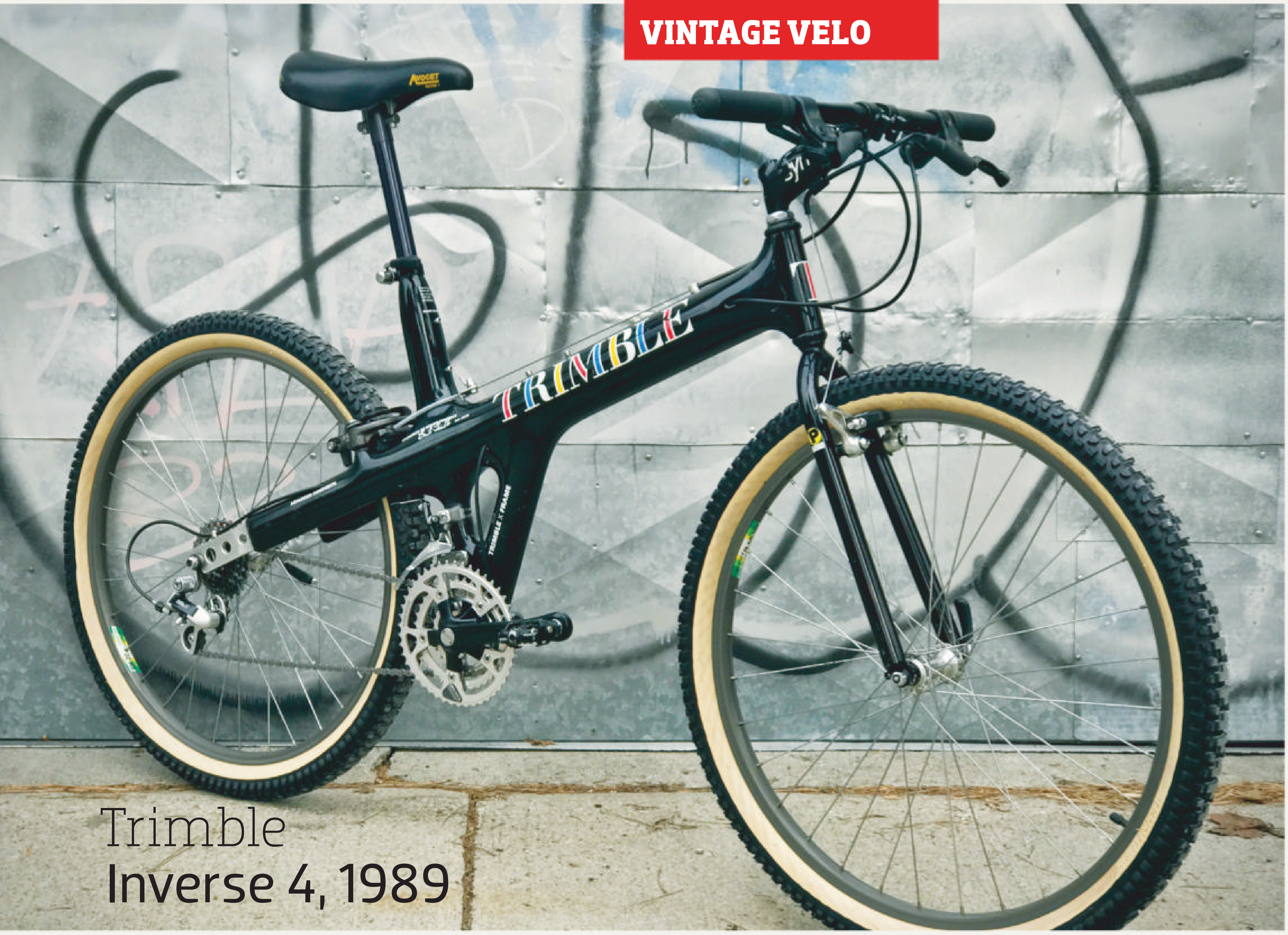
Gracey Hemstreet makes Hardline history

In 2024, Gracey Hemstreet became the first female rider to complete a full Red Bull Hardline course. In February, she won the first official women's Hardline competition in Tasmania. Eight women were invited to the event and many, such as Valentina Höll and Tahnée Seagrave, elected not to compete. Erice van Leuven crashed during a practice run, breaking her back, neck and wrist.

So how did Hemstreet conquer such a difficult course? "The main thing for me during practice was to really trust myself. I'm capable of doing all the features. And, of course, asking the guys for a tow if needed. They are all really awesome guys and are always willing to help me out," she said of the riders who help her dial in the necessary speed to clear some of the features, like the 24-m gap jump. In the end, Hemstreet made it seem almost effortless. "I kept it chill, and had fun," she said.

Hemstreet plans to take on Hardline Wales in July. "I've never ridden that track before, so it should be pretty scary but awesome at the same time," she said. "It will be good to work with the girls who have ridden most of the course, as well."—*Matthew Pioro*

Photo: Nick Iwanyshyn



Trimble
Inverse 4, 1989

Brent Trimble is one of the most important bike designers in the history of the industry. He gets much credit for introducing carbon fibre to bicycle construction. While some played around with the material in bonded tube form, Trimble created what's considered the first carbon monocoque bicycle you could buy: the 1987 Kestrel 4000. With the backing of Trek co-founder Bevil Hogg and Tom French, also from Trek, Cycle Composites Inc. started the carbon revolution with Trimble's designs that essentially created the industry standard we have today.

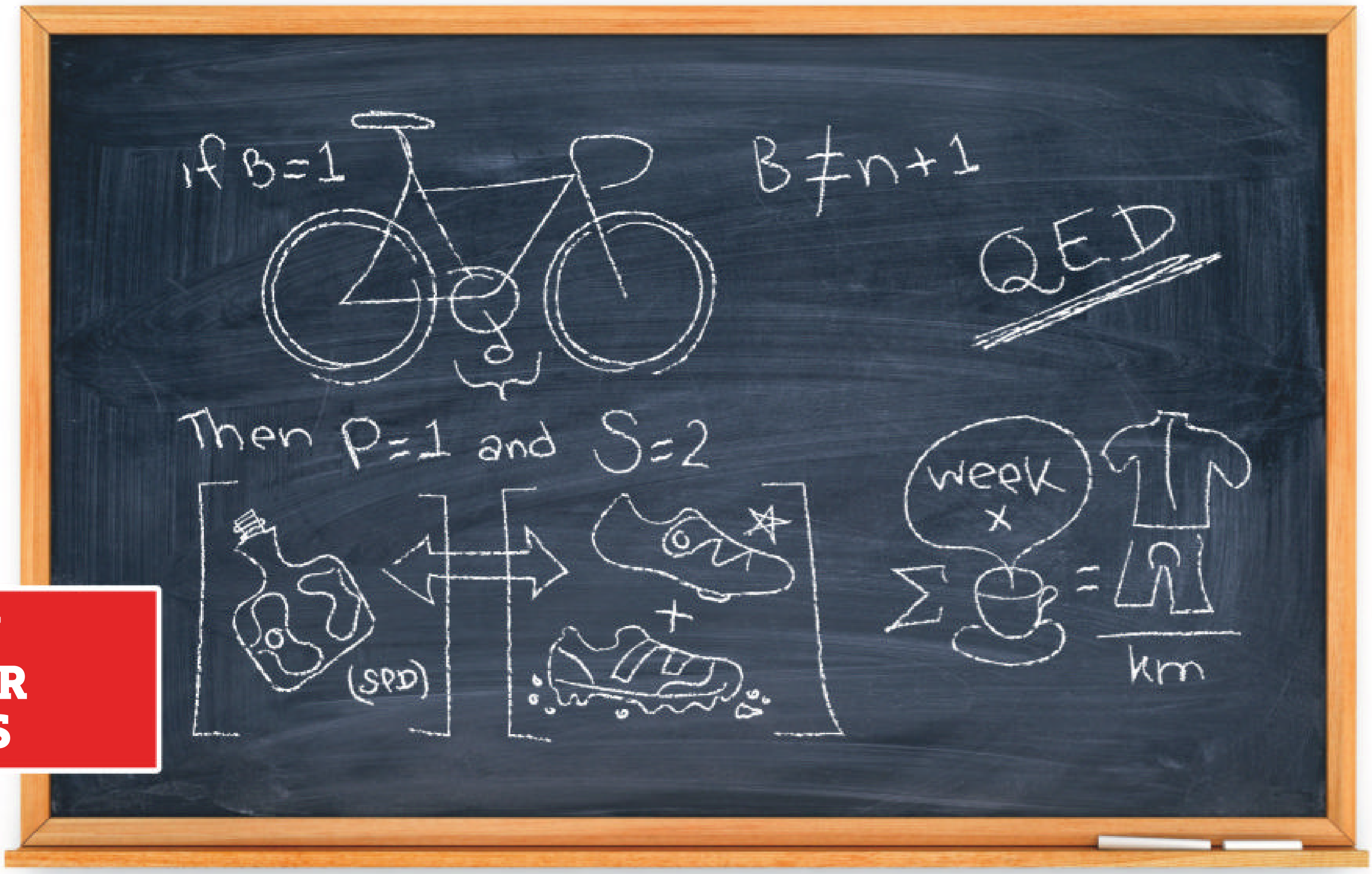
While Trimble's first composite bike was meant for the road, he himself was an avid off-roader and mountain bike racer. He began experimenting with off-road carbon frames leading to his first semi-production design, the 1988 Trimble Carbon Cross. Aptly named, the frame was a throwback to cross designs of the late 1800s, albeit made out of space-aged carbon. The design was well-received, but needed some refinement if it was going to go into full production.

This is my 1989 Trimble Inverse 4. There were only about 500 of these wild bikes made in the first batch. According to this Inverse 4's serial number, this one sits right in the middle of that production. The Inverse 4 is essentially a refined Carbon Cross with an extra bit of reinforcement connecting the bottom bracket to the main monocoque. I picked up this bike locally, just outside Toronto, from its original owner. Finding a bike like this one not far from home is obscenely rare in my experience. Early boutique mountain bikes didn't make it north very often, so getting my hands on this Inverse 4 was a real treat. The bike is in excellent condition. The build features a pretty basic Shimano XT M732 group, Kona P2 fork, Syncros stem and seatpost, Ritchey bar and new-old-stock Araya/Shimano XT M730 wheels. It's really only missing one part: the Trimble Roo bar continues to elude me. It's a one-piece composite bar/stem created by Richard "Roo" Trimble, Brent's brother.

What's Inverse 4 like to ride? Well, it takes a bit of getting used to. First off, you need to be prepared to stop often as nearly every rider older than 40 on the trail will ask about it. Seriously though, it rides great. The frame is insanely stiff so it's going to beat you up a bit, but 20" standover height is ingenious by modern standards let alone the late '80s. It's one of my absolute favourites. The Trimble Inverse 4 is just everything I love about this hobby.—*Jim Whittington*

Photos: Jim Whittington

> *"This little gem of an equation is the golden ticket to all cycling-related splurges."*



THE SCENE

THE NEW MATH FOR CYCLISTS

Advanced number crunching can lead you to the gear, and financial figures, that will make you happy

by **Holly Randell**

N+1 is the OG cyclist math equation, where the number of bikes you own plus one has long been the go-to justification for spending a lot of money on a new bike. With the all-road frameset growing in popularity because of its versatility and allowing cyclists to opt for one bike with two sets of wheels (one for road, the other for gravel), it's time for the cycling community to update the equation. We need fresh formulas to justify splurging on something other than another bike.

$S = 2$ and $P = 2$, but the new math is $P = 1$

The all-road pioneer who needs to measure power data can choose to install a crank-based power meter. Then, they'll need two sets of pedals: one pair for road and one for gravel. Their other option is to buy power-measuring pedals for their road shoes and their shoes running MTB/gravel cleats. To all of the watt watchers reading this, I see you.

For my analog enthusiast friends, in this scenario, you still have the pleasure of spending your money on two sets of pedals because the shoes must simply match the terrain.

I'll confess that as a cyclist who lives for monster gravel rides, I can be a bit of a sloth when it comes to prepping my bike for 5 a.m. road rides. On more than one occasion, I've stumbled downstairs at the crack of dawn, ready to roll on tarmac, only to realize my SPD gravel pedals were still on my bike from my most recent all-road adventure. At that point, I'm already sporting my white socks and shoes, so it really spikes my heart rate when the necessary swap to my road pedals makes me late for the ride. To avoid this scenario, I recently said goodbye to my road pedals with strain gauges and splurged on power SPD pedals and two pairs of gravel shoes. I am all about that "stay ready, so that I don't have to get ready" life.

Showing my work for $S = 2$ while $P = 1$.

I understand that riding SPD pedals on the road might be seen by diehard roadies as just as uncouth as wearing flip-flops to a black-tie gala. For my unorthodox arrangement to work, I've chosen very specific shoes to ensure the cycling universe remains in balance. The "road" gravel shoes are a bright white pair for morning group races, er, I mean *rides*. (Yeah. "Rides." Wink, wink.) This set goes nicely with my Insta-worthy white socks and perfectly curated kit. Since I don't have a white shoe sponsor like Mathieu van der Poel, my shoes will need to stay pristine. They'll be forever off-road shoes that barely touch dirt.

The other pair, however, will get more badass the dirtier they are. It's a pair that tells everyone on the ride that I'm not afraid to play in the mud. These shoes can lean into the gravel-party vibe with a sock colour and pattern combination to suit any post-ride hang.

Cost per use = Total cost/number of uses

This little gem of an equation is the golden ticket to all cyclist-related splurges.

Let's say I rock the same kit twice a week from April 1 until I hit up Zwift indoors after Nov. 30. That's 2 times/week × 34.86 weeks = 69.72 rides. Now, if my cycling kit set me back $500, the cost per use is a cool $7.17 per use per season. That's like a cappuccino at the mid-ride rest stop. If I wear the kit a few more times in a year, and then onward to future seasons, it's basically free. Plus, if you have a place that repairs kit (Velocolour in my area) you're not just extending the lifespan of your gear, you're practically cashing in on your investment. Apply the cost per use formula properly, and you'll see it's like you're being paid to keep wearing your jersey and bibs. But why stop at cost per use? Cost per kilometre is a pretty savvy way to get even more bang for your buck.

Can cyclists like us put a price tag on the pure joy of the sport and all of the stuff we collect? You bet your bike we can, and we absolutely should. This buyer's guide is the perfect starting point to begin training as a cycling mathlete. *Cha-ching!*

Sponsored Content

How You Can Be Part of the Terry Fox Ride of Hope

The cross-Canada journey marks the Terry Fox Marathon of Hope's 45th anniversary and builds on his legacy

by **Hannah Marais**

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Have you ever dreamed about cycling across the country for a great cause?

This year, a small team of dedicated cyclists will be doing just that while hoping to inspire others to support the 45th anniversary of the Terry Fox Marathon of Hope. The Ride of Hope national team is made up of eight dedicated and passionate riders. With 10 years of Rides of Hope experience as a guide, this year's event is the organization's most audacious yet: a 32-day, 7,000-km journey starting on June 9 in Vancouver and culminating on July 10 in St. John's, N.L.

"The peloton will pause at locations to pay tribute to Terry's original Marathon of Hope, and in places that continue to honour his legacy," said Nikki Rekman, the Ride of Hope co-ordinator. "We know that's going to bring up a lot of emotion."

Laurent Proulx will be part of the national team setting out from Vancouver in June to make the journey across the country. After being diagnosed with prostate cancer at 48, Proulx founded and organized the Procure Tour de Courage, which has since raised $4 million for cancer research. Proulx has also competed in several triathlons, including Ironman Arizona and the extreme Norseman event in Norway. So, when Terry Fox Foundation executive director Michael Mazza approached Proulx with an opportunity to join the national Ride team, he jumped at the opportunity, despite the challenge it presented.

"I'm anxious to start riding and to dip my back wheel in Vancouver and my front wheel in St. John's," Proulx said.

"While the national team is a very important part of this, The Ride of Hope is not just them. We hope they're going to inspire Canadians to participate with us, or participate in their own Rides wherever they live," Rekman said. Cyclists are welcome to apply to join the national Ride as single-day riders or for a 10-km warm-up with the national Ride team. Interested in hosting your own Ride or joining a community Ride? Visit Terry Fox Ride of Hope to find a Ride near you!

With an ambitious Ride of Hope goal of $1 million for the anniversary year, every rider, including you, is encouraged to participate, donate and cheer for the Ride! Head to Terry Fox Ride of Hope to sign up, donate and support the best cancer research in Canada. *ride.terryfox.ca*

RIDE OF HOPE 330km
"EACH OF US, AT SOME POINT IN OUR LIVES WILL BE REQUIRED TO REACH DEEP INTO OURSELVES AND HOPE WE CAN FIND THE STRENGTH WITHIN TO TAKE ONE MORE STEP LIKE TERRY DID." - MICHAEL BUBLÉ

"The peloton will pause at locations to pay tribute to Terry's original Marathon of Hope."

Photos: The Terry Fox Foundation

ZWIFT ACADEMY
Alpecin HAIR BOOSTER
deceuninck WINDOWS

THE SCENE

WATOPIA TO WORLDTOUR SHOT

Canada's next road superstar is an elite mountain biker?

by **Molly Hurford**

In early March, Toronto's Noah Ramsay won Zwift Academy, securing a contract with Alpecin-Deceuninck Development for the season. You might be wondering, who the heck is Noah Ramsay and where did he come from? The 22-year-old mountain biker made headlines earlier this season when he managed to hold a solo breakaway with an average of 400 watts at the 90-minute Tour de Via Italia race in Windsor, Ont., then won the Iceman Cometh Challenge mountain bike race in Michigan, after finishing fifth in the short track at the Mont-Sainte-Anne World Cup and 11th at the Lake Placid World Cup XCO race. Oh, and he was third in a beer mile at Toronto's Christie Cross.

He might have been a slow starter as a late teen, but he has serious talent on the mountain bike, road and trainer. It's a scattershot approach that paid off big. I chatted with Ramsay when the win was still under wraps to get some intel on how it all played out.

Sitting outside on the small terrace of his new apartment in Spain, Ramsay's formerly bleached blonde hair—it was a Canadian under-23 MTBer thing, don't ask—is back to brown. "I realized with that hair, I was just going to look stupid, especially if I lost," he says with a grin. But with his win, maybe he could have pulled it off.

"I'm still not sure how to describe it: it's a good feeling that I've gotten to this point," he says of the win. "I knew I wanted to race for a pro team this coming season, but I wasn't sure if I wanted to race for a pro road team. I've done everything in a different way than most people do it. But nonetheless, I got here."

The Zwift Academy training races were happening as the mountain bike season wound down in the fall 2024, which initially deterred Ramsay. But as the other racers were heading into the off-season, he took a few days off, and then launched into the Zwift campaign. "It was quite rushed because the window is normally really big to do the qualifiers. You have from August until the beginning of November. But since I was still racing, I started the workouts with three weeks left. So I had to do two races and several workouts in that three week window, and they're basically all max efforts."

Luckily, those efforts actually set him up to hit Iceman Cometh in prime racing form. Also, Ramsay wasn't just able to secure entry into Zwift Academy's final competition, he was able to win Iceman—beating out pros like Alexey Vermeulen, Kerry Werner and Tyler Orschel.

At Zwift's finals in Spain, the events were captured for a

> "My advantage is that I'm willing to go until the doors are just completely blown off."

Photo: Courtesy Zwift

reality show-style video series that launched in February and culminated with Ramsay's. He's gone from not knowing if he'd be able to afford another season of racing at the World Cup level to training with Mathieu van der Poel in less than two months—with a camera in his face. Intimidating? Maybe. Ramsay was more worried about not looking cocky on camera.

Prior to the deal with Alpecin-Deceuninck Development, Ramsay raced for Bateman's Bicycle Company, a club in his hometown, for the bulk of his career. To say that it's a bit of a jump is an understatement. But when you zoom out and look at his past five years, it makes sense. Ramsay started riding seriously during the pandemic, which meant the only competitive outlet was online. Despite his mountain bike aspirations, his early racing was all done on Zwift, though when the world reopened, he got outside ASAP.

"While Noah's fall was really spectacular, it comes on the back of about five years of really dedicated training in several disciplines, including esports," says cycling coach Peter Glassford, who started working with Ramsay in 2019, just ahead of the pandemic. "Noah has tried many types of cycling. I think this season is a culmination of his work ethic, coach-ability and sticking with it long enough to get some bounces in his favour. We have seen his numbers continue to improve and his skills and tactics have come a long way in the past couple of years. His ability to perform in esports combined with the skills he has from mountain biking and his mindset this fall made me quite sure that once he was in the finals in Spain, he would be very hard to beat."

"In these e-races, it really comes down to you against yourself," Ramsay says. "It's tough because you can't actually see the competition. You see that somebody's attacking, you feel like you're dying, you can't see them to see how they're feeling. But you keep going because you're not dead. My advantage is that I'm willing to go until the doors are just completely blown off."

The main difference between racing in Watopia versus racing IRL? The pre-race meal. During the qualifiers, Ramsay's days were packed, but he wasn't worried about his fuelling options. "I would just work a shift all day, maybe go for a spin outside for an hour before to get the legs moving, and I might eat a Domino's pizza before I hopped on the trainer."

Get this man a Domino's sponsorship, stat.

Ramsay's life has changed drastically. He's living in a new country, racing in a new discipline, and no longer working in a bike shop. He has his own team mechanic. But is he nervous? Not really.

"It's a completely new discipline for me and honestly, that's exciting," Ramsay says. "I guess I'm just going to see if I can learn how to race this style of racing that so many North Americans come and try and fail. And we'll just see if I succeed or not."

OPPOSITE
Zwift Academy winner Noah Ramsay

BELOW
Ramsay rides alongside Jasper Philipsen of Alpecin-Deceuninck

Photo: Zwift Academy

"When you ride, look at car mirrors and into parked vehicles for occupants."

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE INVOLVED IN A DOORING INCIDENT

1. Seek medical attention and contact emergency services.
2. Take pictures of the driver's licence plate, insurance information and gather witness information.
3. Report to the police.
4. Contact a lawyer.

How to prevent the dreaded door prize

by **Dave Shellnutt**

My colleagues and I recently moved offices. For me, that change means I have extended my bicycle commute, which brings me immense joy. There's nothing like getting ready for a day and winding down from one by pedalling hard and feeling the breeze on my face. But, on one stretch of my daily route there is street parking to my right in one lane and streetcar tracks and faster moving motor vehicles to my left. That means I ride through the dooring zone for part of the way to work. It can be unnerving, especially considering year after year we are retained by numerous cyclists injured in dooring incidents.

Most provinces have, on paper, laudable legislation aimed at deterring this common road-safety issue. The laws penalize those who would toss their door into moving traffic without first checking to see if it is safe to do so. This wasn't always the case. Even in 2017, Nova Scotia was one of four provinces including New Brunswick, Manitoba and Saskatchewan that did not classify dooring as a specific offence under road-safety legislation.

Along with newly minted laws have come increased financial penalties. In 2020, the provincial government in British Columbia increased the fine for dooring to $368.

Other provinces have engaged in public education campaigns to raise awareness about doorings. In Quebec, in addition to increasing fines from $30 to between $200 and $300 in 2016, the public auto insurer, the SAAQ, actively promotes tools for motorists and their passengers to avoid dooring someone. The SAAQ has started trumpeting the use of the "Dutch reach." The Dutch reach is the practice of opening a car door using the hand that's farthest away from it. By doing so the person's body turns and faces the vehicle's blind spot, giving them a chance to see oncoming cyclists (and other cars for that matter).

The Dutch reach is a great, cost-effective, easy-to-implement behaviour change. Provinces across the country could amend driver training programs and tests to teach and normalize the Dutch reach.

The NDP in Ontario tried to bring forward legislation to that effect in 2019, called the Teach the Reach Act. Unfortunately, the bill died after its second reading.

Not to be deterred, MPP Chris Glover has been looking to engineering ingenuity to curtail incidents of doorings. Glover, a dooring victim himself, worked with the University of Toronto Mechanical and Industrial Engineering Department to develop a camera system set up inside mirrors that prevents doors from opening when a cyclist enters the dooring zone.

We cyclists should actively encourage our local and provincial governments to give dooring incidents and their victims the attention and support they deserve. We must also continue to cycle defensively. I'll be relying on the age-old tricks and tactics of seasoned cyclists before me. You should, too. When you ride, look at car mirrors and into parked vehicles for occupants. Ring your bell constantly and have flashing lights to announce and illuminate your approach. Take more of the lane to the left when it's safe to do so. And, if you're like me, slow down and assume every door is out to get you.

A good defence is only as good as a strong offence, so we encourage everyone to continue to advocate locally for safe infrastructure, laws aimed at reducing dooring incidents and teaching our non-cycling friends the simple steps they can take to prevent injury.

Dave Shellnutt is the founder and managing partner of The Biking Lawyer LLP, lawyers for injured cyclists, *thebikinglawyer.ca*

Adventure Biking Project

Mountain bike programming that takes young riders to the trails, and beyond

by **Rob Sturney**

***Canadian Cycling Magazine* has profiled many clubs** that are racing-focused or more tilted toward the social and recreational aspects of riding. But in Glovertown—a community of around 2,000 people situated on Newfoundland's Alexander Bay, 62 km from Gander—a different type of two-wheeled organization has been growing for the past dozen years. It's the youth-oriented, life skills-grounded Adventure Biking Project.

Andy Poole, director of the Project, hatched the idea back in 2008. A local teacher, he wanted to get kids off the couch and engaged in the rural Newfoundland wilderness around them. Along with a couple of partners, he launched the ABP in 2013 as a school extracurricular activity. In 2023, the group became a non-profit outfit. Today it has 100 members, including 12 youth leaders and 10 adult volunteers running kids' programs in Glovertown and the nearby town of Eastport.

Poole and the other project designers drew their inspiration from Sprockids, originally a self-esteem and anger-management program rooted in mountain biking and designed by elementary teacher Doug Detwiller on British Columbia's Sunshine Coast in 1990. Personal development emphasizing confidence and leadership is the core of the Adventure Biking Project. Poole says, "We use a bike as a tool to help youth grow; we focus on growing the whole child."

Starting with Sprockids programs, kids ages five to nine can get an introduction to riding. The Adventure Biking Junior component is for riders 10 to 13. They get acquainted with endurance riding and bushcraft for bikepacking adventures. The older, experienced teens then impart these skills to the younger sets.

Maintenance is an important part of the Project, which is partnered with St. John's shop The Outfitters. A Monday Mechanics course this past January to March prepared the Grade 7 to 12 gang for the upcoming season. The young wrenches not only work on their own machines, but also those in the ABP fleet. In spring and fall, pop-up shops get mechanics fixing the bikes of kids in other programs and riders in the wider community.

The young riders take to ATV tracks, gravel forest roads and, of course, trails, including the nearby sections of Newfoundland T'Railway, Ken Diamond Memorial Park and Terra Nova National Park, which recently added mountain bike trails. Winter biking is very popular with the group, its members revelling in the rise of the fat bike.

PROFILE
Adventure Biking Project

Location	Glovertown, N.L.
Established	2013
Members	100
Online	*adventurebikingproject.org*

What's ahead for the Project? Poole is looking to this year's expansion into competition. Adventure Biking Project's purchase of Giant Trance X bikes set in motion plans to start a youth race team this summer. The squad aims to compete on the island, specifically at the Long Range Enduro on the west coast in Corner Brook and the St. John's Enduro Series on the east coast. Not only will these events provide more opportunities for fun, but they serve ABP's goal to expose teens to what Poole calls "other identified cycling challenges." Also on the horizon is an expansion of the work-experience wing in conjunction with a town development that's upcoming. There are plans to build a shed that will act as a cycling hub and youth centre. It seems the Bicycling Adventure Project is building so much, both on and off the bike.

Photos: Lori Moss

How to Make Sure Caffeine Helps, and Doesn't Hinder, Your Rides

There's more to taking in the supplement than downing a cup of joe

THE SCENE

NUTRITION

by **Matthew Kadey**

Compared with, say, heat training or beet juice, caffeine is an easier sell as a performance aid. It doesn't take a lot of convincing as it comes from agreeable sources like coffee, chocolate and cola. It's the most widely consumed stimulant in the world. Many of us see caffeine as being integral in keeping us happy, alert and firing on all cylinders.

A huge research review published in the *Journal of the International Society of Sports Nutrition* confirms that the right amount of caffeine can turn the tables on several measures of athletic performance. The effects include lessening the perception of effort and fatigue, increasing muscle strength and power, bumping up VO2 max, improving reaction time and alertness, and increasing total work capacity—all of which can help you go harder for longer.

The mechanisms for how caffeine perks up your workouts appear to be varied, including stimulating the central nervous system, altering substrate metabolism and having a direct effect on muscles to reduce the loss in muscular force and contractile functioning as effort increases. There does not appear to be major differences in caffeine's performance-enhancing powers across the sexes.

But to get more specific, let's dive into what science says about how best to use caffeine to ramp up your rides and into some of the cautionary points you need to know.

You need to get enough

Dosing matters regarding caffeine's ability to amp up your ride. The recommended athletic protocol based on research, which many cyclists fail to follow, is 3 to 6 mg of caffeine per kilogram of body weight, which works out to 200 to 400 mg for a 68-kg (150-lb.) rider. At this level, it's possible to experience a 2 to 4 per cent increase in endurance. It's feasible that lower levels will give you a boost, but perhaps just not as much as what would occur with higher intakes. People frequently exposed to caffeine may need the upper end of this dosage range to experience a workout bump than those who aren't exposed to the stimulant.

The best way to determine your effective dose is through repeated and careful experimentation during training sessions of variable intensity and duration.

Coffee is variable

Many cyclists swear by their pre-ride coffee. But if you are relying on coffee for its performance-boosting caffeine, getting in the optimal dose requires precision. Brewed coffee's caffeine typically ranges from 60 to 200 mg depending on what kind of beans you're using, how they're prepared, how big your cup is, and so on. (Ounce for ounce, espresso is more concentrated in caffeine than regular coffee.) The issue is that it can be tough to know how much caffeine you are getting from coffee. You might need to drink more than you think to reach the recommended dose for performance benefits.

For this reason, some athletes will turn to supplements like pills, gum and chews for more controlled doses. Some look to caffeinated beverages, like energy drinks or canned coffee, which state how much of the stimulant they provide. (Also, it's thought that caffeine from sources like gum gets into the system faster and thus has a more rapid effect than from its brewed counterpart.) Of course, we have to trust the makers of these products to state an accurate amount of caffeine, which is another story for another time. A further complication is that some of the other bioactive substances in coffee might interfere with the action of caffeine. A protocol for some is to combine brewed coffee and supplements to get up to the necessary caffeine level. Many caffeinated gels, chews and sports drinks contain a caffeine level—generally, 35 mg to

100 mg per serving—that on their own may not give you an optimal dose.

And who knows? Coffee itself may have performance benefits independent of its caffeine content owing to its other compounds that may have metabolic, antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects. It's also worth remembering that drinking coffee is a comforting and familiar routine for many people before going on a ride, which is worth something in and of itself.

You should time it right

The timing of your caffeine can depend on the type of workout. Caffeine can take 30–90 minutes to peak in your blood. For workouts or races lasting approximately one to two hours, you want to get most of your caffeine 30–60 minutes before the start. You could follow up with small hourly doses from caffeinated gels or chews during exercise to maintain higher blood levels of it.

For long-haul rides lasting more than three hours, caffeine is the most advantageous when fatigue is at its highest. If you get all your caffeine before a long workout, its effects might be worn off by the time you need to push to the finish line. Ultimately, you might be best served taking a higher dose of caffeine about halfway through a long workout so it is ready to work when you require it most—a good excuse for a mid-ride espresso break.

Also consider the time of day or night you'll be working up a sweat. If your ride takes place at night, you may want to shelve the caffeinated chews. A *European Journal of Applied Physiology* study found that athletes who used caffeine for performance benefits during evening exercise experienced significant sleep disturbances, such as the delayed onset of sleep. Caffeine generally has a half-life of four to six hours (the time it takes the body to break down 50 per cent of it) with a fair amount of individual variability. So, it continues to energize you long after consumption, which could upset your sleep.

You may want to cut back

There is some data to show that caffeine habituation could make it less of an ergogenic aid. When we are not used to being perked up by caffeine, and then all of a sudden get a shot of the stuff, what transpires is a state of heightened caffeine sensitivity that can more noticeably boost workouts. It's similar to how a regular drinker would need more booze to feel tipsy than a teetotaler.

So a caffeine detox of roughly five days before a big ride might be a worthwhile strategy to try. Remember to also keep track of caffeine in other items like dark chocolate and tea. The caveat is that the side-effects of going off caffeine, such as the migraines, irritability and anxiety that some people experience, can put a damper on training and performance, and cancel out the benefits of putting your morning brew on the sidelines for a few days. It's also possible that if the amount of caffeine you consume before a workout (up to 6 mg per kilogram of body weight) is greater than the amount you are accustomed to daily, you will still see some worthwhile improvements in fitness metrics, regardless of your sex or your training level. Unfortunately, too many studies have failed to report their participant's mean habitual caffeine intake, thus reducing the impact of the results.

> *"It can be tough to know how much caffeine you are getting from coffee."*

It may not work for everyone

Some research suggests that not all athletes have the same reaction to caffeine, and that genotype may play a role in that response. Those with an AA genotype (fast caffeine metabolizer) in the caffeine-metabolizing CYP1A2 gene should expect to gain more from caffeine than those with an AC (intermediate) or CC (slow) genotype. However, until you know your genotype through testing, which isn't easy to obtain, tracking your response with varying caffeine levels within the proposed range can help identify your response to various caffeine levels. These variations may explain why some people experience adverse side-effects, like the jitters, at lower doses and are less tolerant of caffeine.

There is a limit

There is little evidence that shows that going beyond 6 mg per kilo of body weight will make you an even better rider. So ditch the mentality that more is better. Higher doses carry a significant risk of side-effects like a racing heart, nausea, light-headedness and even death at very high amounts. Start at the lower range of this dose recommendation during training periods and work up from there to find the level that gives you a boost without any unwanted side-effects. Remember, nothing new on race day. Be careful about using the upper range limit for caffeine if you are going to be riding in very hot conditions as research shows that it can lower a person's heat tolerance and impair thermoregulation, which can hurt your performance and even your health. Overall, it's recommended that most of us limit our caffeine intake to no more than 400 mg a day, less if you are pregnant. People with existing anxiety conditions, heart arrhythmias, high blood pressure, heart disease or diabetes should consult with their doctors before beginning caffeine supplementation.

Caffeine is not fuel

Caffeine is not a substitute for proper fuelling. Carbs are still critical to keep you going on your longer workouts and races. Caffeine will not save the day if energy levels fade due to poor fuelling and hydration. Just think of the stimulant as a potentially valuable part of a well-planned athletic performance strategy.

Caffeine and the dehydration myth

It's a myth that caffeine is a strong diuretic, thereby raising the risk of dehydration during exercise. During physical activity, blood is diverted to working muscles so the kidneys don't receive their normal blood flow, which means less urine overall is produced, regardless of caffeine consumption. The upshot is that you don't need to be any more diligent about fluid intake to avoid performance sapping dehydration during a bike ride if you have supplemented with reasonable amounts of caffeine.

You don't have to take it

It's always worth remembering that the performance gains from caffeine are modest. A noticeable little extra boost, yes, but nothing that will make you a hero on the bike. Big changes in your performance only come with adequate training and nutrition. So if you decide to give caffeine a pass, rest assured that you can still stay ahead of the pack.

Matthew Kadey is a registered dietician and the designer of Ontario's BT 700 bikepacking route.

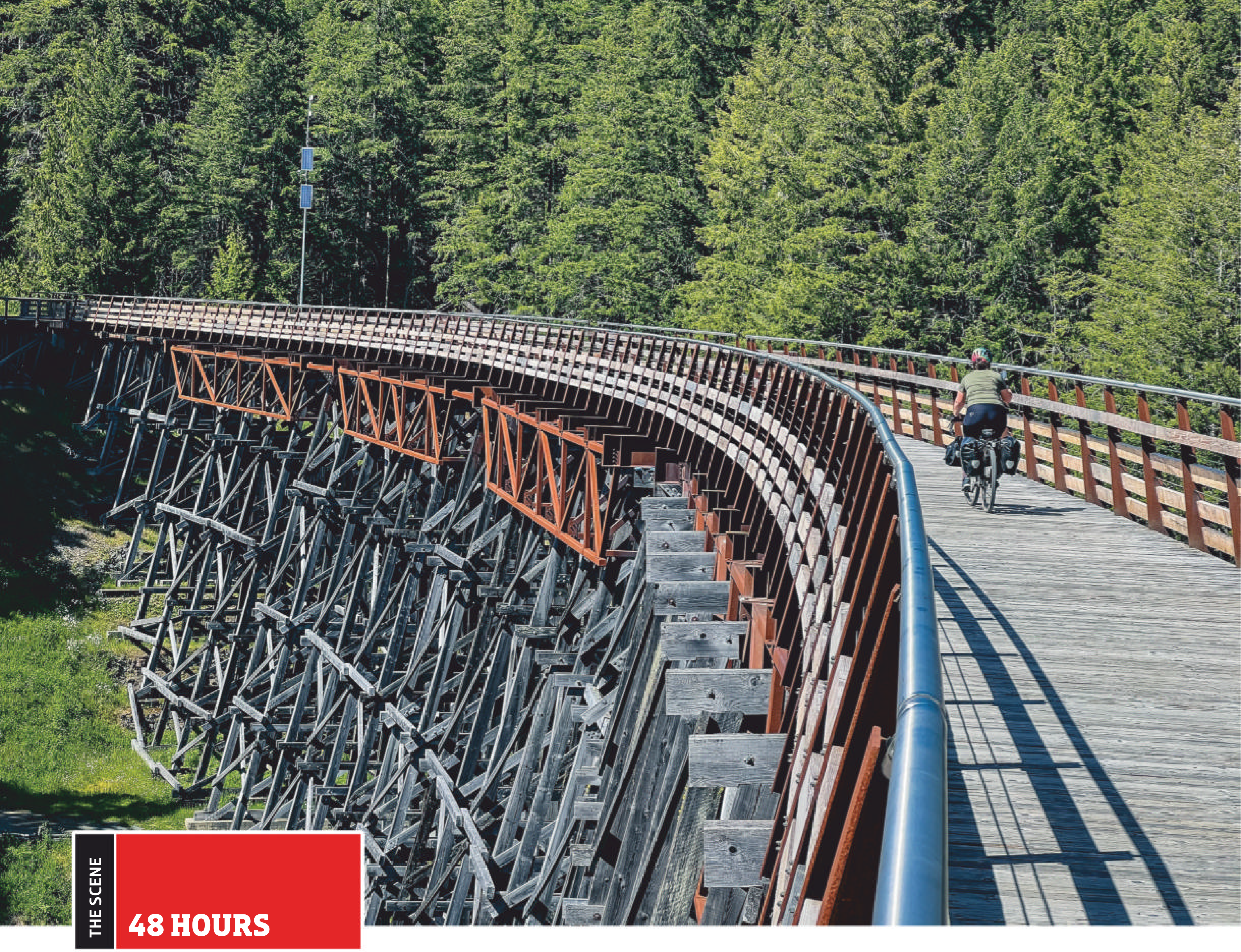


Photo: Scott MacGregor

THE SCENE

48 HOURS

Bikepacking in Victoria's Backyard

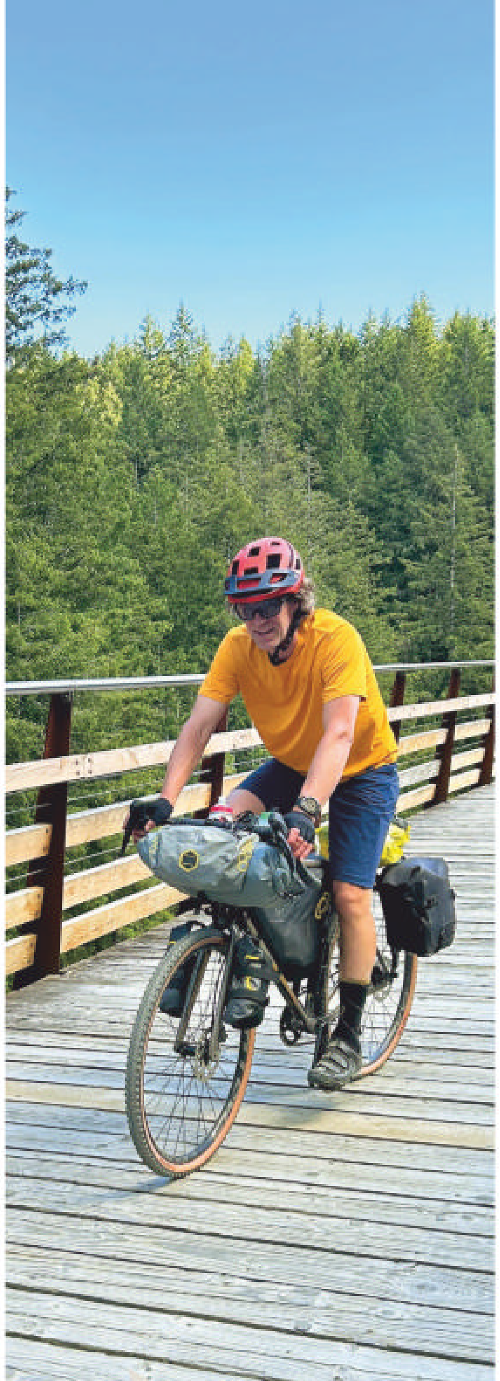
Loops around the Cowichan Valley hold just the right amount of adventure

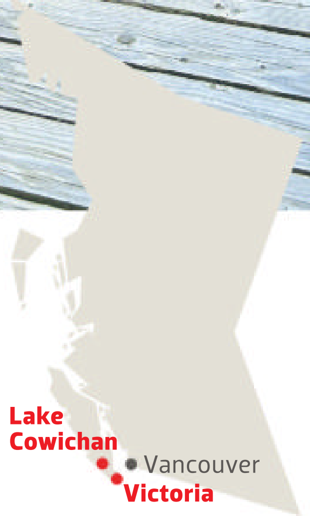
by **Scott MacGregor**

If there is a bikepacking continuum, at one end you'll find Meaghan Hackinen finishing the 2024 Tour Divide in fewer than 16 days (by one hour)—the fastest woman and seventh rider overall to complete the 4,400-km off-pavement bike ride from Banff, Alta., to the U.S./Mexico border that year. At the other end of the bikepacking continuum, you'll find me and my four friends sitting at a campground picnic table on Vancouver Island crushing ice inside a frame bag for margaritas to celebrate the second night on the Cowichan Valley 8, the 190-km two- to three-day bikepacking route beginning and ending in downtown Victoria. Slightly less badass, especially when I tell you we stretched it out to four days.

Writer and editor at *bikepacking.com* Miles Arbour has ridden bikes all over the world. Lately he's been pioneering his own routes up and down Vancouver Island. In 2019, he was hunkered down in Victoria, house-sitting after a six-month van trip all over Canada and the U.S. Scouting new routes with his buddy Julian, he got to stitching together three regional Island trails—Galloping Goose Trail, Sooke Wilderness Trail and the Trans Canada Trail—mixing gravel, doubletrack and paved paths, creating a scenic and rewarding route that can be enjoyed by the more than 400,000 residents of the Greater Victoria metropolitan area.

The Cowichan Valley 8, as proposed by Arbour, begins and ends at the British Columbia Parliament Buildings in downtown Victoria. The ride is sort of a figure eight up and back down the Cowichan Valley, popping in and out of municipalities along the way. My friend Nikki Rekman, the kingpin in our little adventure, had her own idea for how the route should be run.





Nikki lives and rides bikes in the Fraser Valley on the Lower Mainland. She's a local ride volunteer lead and co-ordinator of the Terry Fox Foundation regional Rides of Hope and the National Ride. She's also a bikepacking cheap ass.

Instead of beginning the ride in downtown Victoria, as Arbour intended, we started on the mainland. Nikki had us meet up at the Park and Go just short of the ferry docks. We then rode our bikes to the boat, saving us from paying BC Ferries for the transportation of three motor vehicles from Tsawwassen (Vancouver) to Swartz Bay (Victoria). Our adventure began with a 2-km ride to the ferry itself. With the money we saved, we enjoyed a crepe breakfast aboard the Coastal Celebration, feeling like the coolest people in the dining room.

If you pedal the Cowichan Valley 8 properly, you head west from Victoria on the Galloping Goose Regional Trail. If you're the type of person who eats your brussels sprouts first to get them out of the way, you'll be happy when the biggest climb of the route begins at the 24 km, just to the west of Goldstream Provincial Park. The entire ride has only 1,853 m of climbing, and by eating your veggies at the start, you'll have choked back most of the elevation on your first day. All downhill from here, they say.

Nikki's plan was not about greens from the get-go. We left the ferry at Swartz Bay pedalling 15 km south to meet up with the official route, and then on to the small village of Brentwood Bay where we caught another ferry across Saanich Inlet to Mill Bay. Then it was a short ride to Shawnigan Lake for lunch.

By doing the last part first, we saved the big climbing sessions for our final day after a few training days and for a time when our bikes were a few pounds lighter of food and tequila. Either way, there are some punchy sections, finely balancing power, fatigue, gear selection and tire traction on the crushed limestone doubletrack paths of the Sooke Hills Wilderness Regional Park. We pushed our bikes up the steepest sections.

The route is not exactly a figure of eight; it's more like a dumbbell with the best 13 km of the Cowichan Valley Trail as the handle between the loops at either end. The handle section features the historic Kinsol Trestle, a spectacular 44-m high

Photos: Annette Hillerhoek, Nikki Rekman

CVRD
THE GREAT TRAIL
Cowichan Valley Trail
Welcome
Where you are
North to Glenora Trails Head Park - 14 km
South to McGee Creek Trestle - 6.5 km
Contact Us

and 188-m long wooden bridge across the Koksilah River. Constructed out of old-growth Douglas-fir timbers back in 1920, the Kinsol Trestle is one of the highest railway trestles in the world. The last train that rumbled over the bridge did so in 1979. Thirty-two years and around $7.5 million in renovations later it opened to cyclists, hikers and equestrians as part of the Trans Canada Trail.

Farther west on the Cowichan Valley Trail, just inside the boundary of the Cowichan River Provincial Park, we found the Holt Creek Bridge, another original CN Rail wooden trestle, where it stands, for now. "The existing Holt Creek Bridge will be replaced with a new bridge to ensure a safe and accessible trail connection between Shawnigan Lake and Lake Cowichan," reads the Government of British Columbia Holt Creek Bridge Replacement web page. Officially, the trail closed on Nov. 7, 2024 between Glenora Trailheads Park and the west side of Holt Creek Bridge as the structure is getting replaced. It's expected to reopen in May. Until then, there's no official detour. The alternative? "A quick look at Ride with GPS heatmaps shows a potential option on the south side of the official route that follows logging roads," Arbour writes. Think of it as the type of riding that slides the Cowichan Valley 8 closer to a Meaghan Hackinen adventure on the bikepacking continuum.

The point farthest to the northwest on this route is the summer tourist town of Lake Cowichan. It offered the perfect opportunity for us to get off our bikes and out of the rain to enjoy fish and chips, microbrew and some freshly baked pastries.

Photos: Nikki Rekman, Annette Hilierhoek, Scott MacGregor

"We saved the big climbing for our final day after a few training days and for a time when our bikes were a few pounds lighter of food and tequila."

All of my bikepacking to date has been like my hiking trips—remote, up and over mountain passes, camping wherever, seeing no one. The Cowichan Valley 8 is different. Cultural. Social. On our trip, there'd be hours when it would feel like we were alone and on a wilderness adventure. Then we'd be riding through a bustling Saturday morning farmers market. En route, we'd meet dozens of other cyclists loaded with gear: some doing the 8, others carrying on to somewhere else. We received local intel from park wardens, shared cocktails with hikers and met friendly locals proud of their neighbourhoods and the trails we were travelling through.

We took what is probably already Arbour's most popular Vancouver Island bikepacking route and added in our own Lower Mainland connector—home to approximately three million people living in Metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley who are only a ferry ride away. "Routes like the Cowichan Valley 8 don't get talked about as much as the bigger remote rides," Arbour later said to me. "But it's the over-nighters that get people into it and get us all on our bikes more often."

Not hardcore enough for you? Well it is for Meaghan Hackinen, who in April 2022 rode and blogged about most of the Cowichan Valley 8 trails. "With a summer of European adventures lined up and James [her partner on that trip] on the roster for the Tour Divide" Hackinen writes, "our aims were to have fun and scout some new routes, on the hunt for the tastiest bakeries and most stunning camp spots along the way."

Photo: Annette Hilierhoek

Details

Getting there

You can begin the Cowichan Valley 8 from almost anywhere in the South Island Region of Vancouver Island, including the Victoria International Airport. Or, do like we did and get yourself to the Park and Go in Tsawwassen on the mainland and begin your bike trip by pedalling onto the ferry.

Where to stay

To call this a bikepacking trip, you should probably camp at least one night, but you don't need to. Depending on the direction you choose and your daily distances, consider Stoltz Pool campground in Cowichan River Provincial Park, Bamberton Provincial Park and Goldstream Provincial Park (*bcparks.ca*). We camped two nights a little off route at sites we booked using Hipcamp—it's like AirBnB for camping. And of course there are hotels and bed and breakfasts in all the towns along the way.

Where to eat

This is one of those trips on which you could make a credit card commercial: "There are some things money can't buy; for everything else, there's Mastercard." We carried half our meals and enjoyed the rest in restaurants and cafés along the way. Top picks include Jake's at the Lake pub in Lake Cowichan (*csbrewery.ca*), Duncan Garage Cafe & Bakery (*duncangaragecafe.ca*) and The Stonehouse Restaurant & Pub (*stonehousepub.ca*) at the Swartz Bay ferry.

What to ride

The Cowichan Valley 8 is 190-km long, roughly 75 per cent of which is off-pavement. There's 1,853 m of climbing, most of which happens during the first afternoon, leaving the rest a pretty cruisy adventure. We had proper gravel bikes fully kitted out, but met other groups on touring bikes with panniers, and others on old mountain bikes and carrying backpacks. Unless it's really rainy and muddy, anything goes. Ⓒ

CRANK COFFEE CO
GRAN FONDO
LIGHT ROAST
TORRÉFACTION LÉGÈRE
GRAN FONDO
CRANK COFFEE CO
LIGHT ROAST
CRANK COFFEE CO
BATCH ROASTED IN
CANADA
LOT TORRÉFIÉ AU

TRAINING

TRAINING TIPS

"Pursuing your goals is not only good for you, but the whole family, too"

Coaching Tips for Cycling Moms

You can balance kids, work and the bike

by **Peter Glassford**

For the past 20 years, I have been a professional full-time coach. This year, 40 per cent of the athletes I coach are women, which is significant as studies show that 20 to 30 per cent of competitive cyclists in North America are women and only 18 per cent of Canadian adult women are active in any sport. But a concerning trend I've noticed among the athletes I've worked with is that when mothers stop training, it's for different reasons than fathers and women who aren't raising kids. With moms, they tend to stop because of family responsibilities, while other athletes might drop out after achieving a goal, suffering injury or illness, or due to a significant life event.

Moms do not stop training due to a lack of motivation or toughness or skill. They just reach a point where they run out of time, energy and possibly funds as they try to complete all they need to do for their families. There's an imbalance—stemming from a complex web of reasons that includes cultural norms and systemic biases—that conspires to make a simple bike ride for a mom, let alone consistent training, a challenge. While I hesitate to add more to a mother's to-do list, I think it's worth exploring ways that mothers can enjoy the benefits of training and pursuing goals, which are not only good for them, but the whole family, too.

A mom deserves goals

When mothers are active, their children are more likely to be active, research shows. Prioritizing personal goals isn't selfish; it sets a powerful example that might actually create an efficiency where your kids do better in their sports and scholastics if they see you out pursuing your own goals.

A related and common mistake made by busy cyclists is trying to maintain peak fitness and the same amount of training year-round. Instead, plan for focused training blocks when family schedules allow. For example, a mom may build toward a spring race while the kids are in school, then scale back in the summer before ramping up again in the fall.

Communicating goals and schedules with family is essential. Adjustments, like arranging midday childcare for a long ride or co-ordinating household duties with a partner, can create training opportunities. While balancing family and sport may be messy at first, consistency establishes new norms and punctuated focus periods help balance the loads on the family across the year.

Finding more time

With kids in sports and other activities, the time, money and energy available for a mother's goals quickly get redistributed. The key is finding a balance that supports both family and personal pursuits. The mothers who

I have coached long-term will do things like run beside kids on scooters and take weekend trips to mountain bike centres where parents can alternately train and spend time playing in forests and rivers with the young ones. These shared experiences build long-term engagement in movement, nature and family.

As a coach, I have found that the idea of pausing is important. It's not stopping. I've seen that moms, especially new moms, find the pause helpful during particularly busy periods of life. Still, they have the goal and expectation of returning to their training in the next "season" of life.

Time-efficient training strategies

Mothers often have unpredictable schedules, so flexible, efficient training methods are crucial. As a coach, I work with moms to identify possible windows and appropriate workouts for their goals. I should note that these training methods are in no way lesser or easier, but they simply work. They'll get any rider going faster and farther.

Strength training

Short (15–30 minute) strength workouts build durability and injury resistance. Prioritize compound movements like squats, deadlifts, pullups and pushups. Simply getting started with what you can do easily and consistently is a great first step. For more ideas, Feisty Media offers excellent resources for women's strength training.

High-intensity interval training (HIIT)

HIIT is time-efficient and highly effective. A single 30-minute session with 6 × 30-second hard efforts or 10–20 minutes of 30-second hard/30-second easy efforts is a great workout. Many mothers I coach integrate these into runs or trainer rides during nap times or soccer practices.

Indoor training

Smart trainers and virtual riding environments can reduce barriers like time, safety and cost. Many moms use indoor riding to fit in extra sessions during nap time or at lunch hour. Virtual group rides can also provide a social and competitive outlet when in-person events aren't feasible.

Cross-training

The mothers I have coached long-term rarely rely solely on cycling. Running, strength work, hiking and rucking (often with the child as the "weighted pack") are common. Many mothers fit in workouts while supervising kids—running loops at the park or doing strength exercises on the sidelines of a sports practice. These workouts will help fitness and are also meant to improve health and wellness by getting time in nature and perhaps some time with friends—or even just a few moments alone.

Finding your balance

Balancing motherhood, family, work, endurance training and everything else is challenging, but strategic planning and support, possibly from a coach, can make it possible. By setting goals, communicating needs and adapting training approaches, mothers can start and continue to pursue their cycling aspirations while setting a positive example for their families.

Peter Glassford is a registered kinesiologist and coach at *consummateathlete.com*.

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TRAINING

TECHNIQUE

by **Steve Thomas**

ABOVE
Kaden Groves wins Stage 2 of the 2024 Vuelta a España

Photo: Stefano Sirotti

With six stage wins and the points classification at the past two editions of the Vuelta a España, plus a Giro d'Italia stage, Australian racer Kaden Groves of Alpecin-Deceuninck is one of the top sprinters in the game right now. While Groves's skills are finely honed, his sprinting got its start by racing for town signs during rides with mates, as many of us do. "We take a similar approach in our training camps," Groves says. "I think it's one of the best ways to improve and prepare for a race."

Groves sees this free-rolling approach as a critical element to building real-time speed, handling skills, tactics and sharpening his race craft. If you want to improve your kick, you should keep racing toward those ad hoc finish lines. "Set up some town sprints and lines along the way for a group ride," he says. "For regular riders, the best thing is to keep it fun and to just race against each other. This is the best way to improve your sprint, especially if you're racing against other people (and not just doing solo intervals). It will improve your sprint a lot."

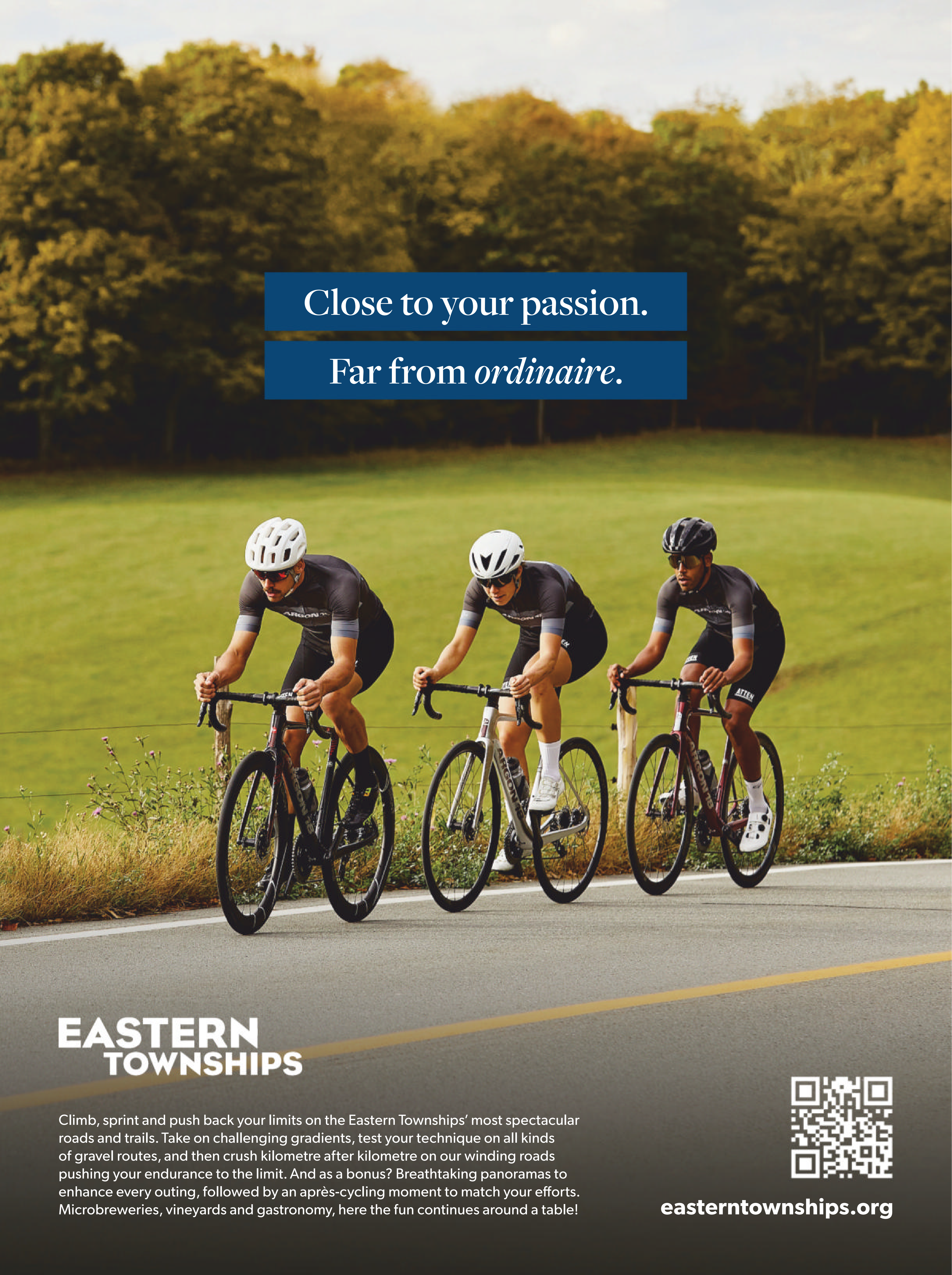
One of the skills you'll pick up through experience is positioning. "At the professional level, it's all about being in the right spot, not being too far forward or too far back, and arriving at the finish as fresh as possible," Groves says. "Technically, we see so much of this work with lead-outs, but most of it is about what comes before the sprint, more so than in the last 200 m."

There are a number of things to take into consideration when preparing your own sprints. "You need to look at the road gradient, see if there are twists or corners coming up and know where the wind is coming from—head, tail or crosswind—that all determines how late or early you can launch your sprint. Those are the details," he says.

With multiple finish lines along your route, call them intermediate sprints if you want, you can experiment with different techniques to find out what matches your natural abilities, and to give yourself more options when it's go-time. "With training, it's good to have a lot of variation with your sprints, whether that's five seconds in a really small gear, just to get the leg speed up, or doing 20-second big-gear sprints. Seated or standing is not an issue," Groves says. "I really think there is no wrong thing to do with sprint training. It's just about the variation, working on the leg speed to build cadence, the longer big-gear sprints to build power, and also to find what feels right and works for you."

That next town-sign sprint is yours for taking. Just remember the advice from the master. Get your timing to perfection, and you'll be nabbing the victories in no time at all.

> "You need to look at the road gradient, see if there are twists or corners coming up and know where the wind is coming from."



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How to Get Your Bike Steering Smoothly

Preventing play in the headset for a safe and fun ride

by **Nick Di Cristofaro**

The smooth turn of the handlebars, the firm pressure of brake pads, the spin of the wheels—when components move properly, your ride is safe and enjoyable. But if something is off at the front of the bike and you feel a wiggle, a jitter or a knock, then you need to investigate so you can get everything working just right.

The headset

The headset lets you rotate the handlebars and ultimately control the direction of your bike. To inspect the headset, first turn the bars from side to side. They should move smoothly and effortlessly. Next, grab the front brake and rock the front end back and forth. There should be no play. The only movement you should feel is the squish of the front tire or movement of the suspension of your mountain bike. If you have a rough-turning set of bars, then it is time to disassemble the headset and service it. The bearings are most likely worn and need to be replaced.

Headsets should be disassembled, cleaned and greased at least once a year. With modern bikes and completely integrated handlebars/stems, this procedure is more important than ever to prevent a costly repair down the road. Some models will require the removal of hydraulic brake lines to replace bearings and subsequently rerouting those lines back to where they were. A simple job on a traditional bicycle that takes about 10 minutes now can take an hour or more. But it's key. The regular service will prevent premature wear.

Getting rid of play

If everything is shipshape with the headset bearings, but there is still a bit of movement when you do the front-brake-and-rock check, take a look at the compression plug, the insert that expands inside a carbon fork's steering tube. A loose or improperly installed plug is one of the most common culprits I see when a headset is constantly developing play. Remove the top cap and stem from the steering tube. Make sure the plug is seated flush against the top of the tube. For extra security, apply a bit of carbon paste to the plug and inside of the steering tube before installation. Tighten the plug's expansion bolt to spec, usually around 8 to 10 Nm.

Ensure there's ample distance between the top cap and steering tube. A steerer that is cut too long (for the stack height) or doesn't have an ample number of spacers placed under the stem will never be adjusted properly. There must be enough space between fork tube and top cap when compressing and pre-loading the headset bearings. If there isn't, there's no amount of top-cap bolt tightening that will fix the issue as you are just bottoming out the cap on top of the steering tube. The fix: add a spacer under the top cap or beneath the stam. A more drastic manoeuvre is trimming the steering tube, which I think is a last resort. Some stems, however, require the steerer cut flush so spacers cannot be added above. Make sure to check the manufacturer's recommendations before forging ahead with a carbon tube trim. And measure twice as you can only cut once.

Nick Di Cristofaro is a veteran bike mechanic and the service manager at Forza Performance.

OTHER PLACES TO LOOK FOR WIGGLES

Front wheel	Examine its bearings and hub. Ensure the axle or quick-release is snug. Are the spokes in order? If the wheel is out of true, it can also give the impression of a loose front end.
Front brake	Check that a rim brake's pad holders and calipers are tight. If the pads are worn, they can cause chatter when you're stopping. For a disc brake rotor, make sure it's attached securely.

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THE FIVE COMMUNITIES MAKING CANADA'S TOP RIDERS

OVERCOMING MANY CHALLENGES, THESE REGIONS HAVE FOUND WAYS TO FOSTER ATHLETES WHO CAN SUCCEED ABROAD

by **Jeff Bartlett**

In the past three years, Canadians have been making headlines across the cycling world. Teammates Hugo Houle and Michael Woods (both of Israel-Premier Tech) captured Tour de France stage wins in back-to-back seasons and Alison Jackson (EF Education-Oatly) won Paris-Roubaix.

Off-road, the successes have been more gravity-focused. Finn Iles (Specialized Gravity) and Jackson Goldstone (Santa Cruz Syndicate) both won elite men's downhill races, while Gracey Hemstreet (Norco Race Division) won five World Cup races as a junior before debuting as an elite. A new tier of cross country riders are just hitting the elite ranks now and appear poised to start competing for podiums like their predecessors Emily Batty and Catharine Pendrel.

Despite these recent achievements, Canadians still face challenging paths to racing at the highest levels internationally because of three key obstacles: distance, weather and popularity. Yet, despite these hurdles, there are some spots in this big country that seem to overcome the difficulties and produce top cycling talent.

Rob Holmgren, performance coach with Stimulus Trek Racing Team who's based in an Ontario hot spot around the city of Barrie, knows the challenges all too well. Three of his five children are elite riders: Isabella, Ava and Gunnar. "Every country gets four junior UCI races to get points," Holmgren said. "In Europe, if riders don't do well in Germany or Belgium, they can go to another country to get the points. It's a huge advantage because there is a very minimal cost to get to the races."

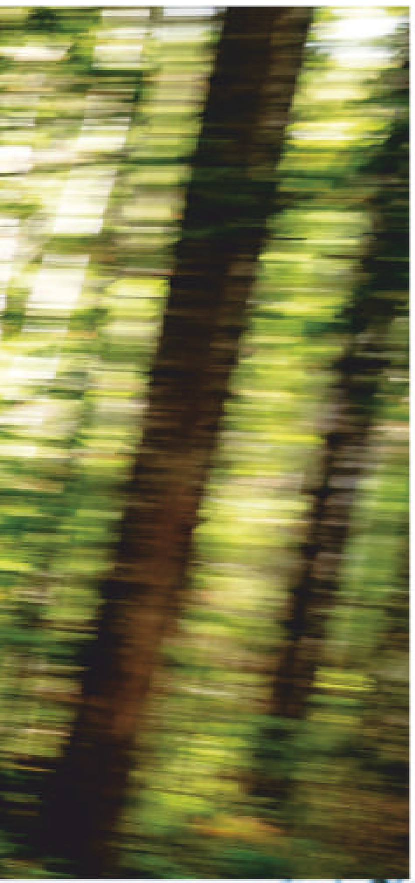
In Canada, it's almost always a long trip to get to a start line. Whether it's a cross country flight or a 12-hour drive, Holmgren pointed out that it is particularly challenging for athletes competing in various disciplines.

Only three cities—Victoria and Vancouver in British Columbia, and St. Catharines, Ont.—enjoy nearly year-round cycling seasons. Despite entirely different paths to the sport's highest level, pro road riders Ryder Hesjedal, Svein Tuft and Steve Bauer grew up in these cities, respectively. All three locations offer competitive riding opportunities with scheduled races and predictable training.

"When I was coming up, the club was the entry-level place," said Bauer, who was fourth at the 1988 Tour de France and is currently the sporting director at Israel-Premier Tech. "The club itself had racing influences and people who were driven by racing or racing heritage."

Bauer, with his decades in the sport, sees a current shift away from road racing, especially for youth, as a concern. He also noted that it presents an opportunity to look at the sport from different perspectives. "The road structure is weaker now," Bauer said, "so our athletes are coming from other places that have easier entry. If kids dig the sport from the beginning, it's the key to long-term success." Holmgren's daughters Isabella and Ava followed the trend Bauer identified: they came up through mountain biking and cyclocross, then signed to

Photo: Liam Wallace



LEFT
Carter Woods shreds his home trails in Cumberland, B.C.

BELLOW AND RIGHT
Emmy Lan on a tear down Mount Washington, B.C.

the WorldTour road team Lidl-Trek in 2023.

There are areas across this big country that use their geography to their advantage. The land is actually perfect for preparing riders for the roads and trails they'll face abroad. But more important are the communities that foster these diverse pockets of cycling in Canada.

COMOX VALLEY AND COASTAL B.C.

Coastal British Columbia, and in particular the Comox Valley, is producing the rising generation of mountain bike racers. Carter Woods (Giant Factory Off-Road), Emmy Lan (Forbidden Dunbar Racing Team), and Emilly Johnston (Scott-SRAM MTB Racing) grew up in the Comox Valley, riding in Cumberland, nearly every day.

"Carter and I grew up riding together," Johnston said, "and there was always a good community to ride with. It's easy to get started when you're just going into the forest with your friends."

As under-23 racers, their cumulative results are incredible. Woods had six World Cup wins racing XCO and XCC before moving into the elite ranks. In 2024, Johnston had one win and five podiums, as well as third place at the UCI mountain bike world championships. As an under-21 rider, Lan achieved 10 World Cup and Enduro World Series wins and two overall enduro World Cup/World Series championships. She is also the current elite DH national champion. All three are racing in elite categories this year.

Photos: Sara Kempner

"I think the long riding season helps, and just how fun the trails are make you want to ride your bike all the time," Johnston said of her hometown area. "Riding in Cumberland is harder than any World Cup XC course, too, so that is a huge advantage. I can go to any World Cup course and I will never be intimidated."

Similarly, Lan attributed her success to the style of trails. While recent developments have focused on increasing accessibility with intermediate flow trails, Cumberland is best known for its more challenging terrain. "The Cumberland trails are quite similar to the UCI enduro courses," Lan said. "It's still a bit rough and has a natural feel that lends itself to building skills and the confidence to ride anywhere."

The area also has a thriving local race scene. While the Island Cup XC series and Twelve Hours of Cumberland races are cornerstone events, both the Dodge City Enduro and Coal Town Throwdown sell out the fastest. The podiums are often crowded with local youth that began racing through the Gravity MTB programing.

Since launching in 2016, Gravity MTB has grown into a mountain bike hub offering coaching, enduro and downhill race training, high-performance sport-specific fitness training and even suspension service. Owners CJ and Chad Hendren are also committed to developing the sport at the early stages. They are heavily involved in initiatives to get kids onto bikes and they continue to mentor cyclists throughout their entire development. Their ambassador program encourages youth leadership, elevating youth to group ride leaders.

Led by Chad, who is also the national team downhill coach and gravity lead for Cycling Canada, Gravity MTB downhill and enduro race training is designed to guide racers as they progress through provincial, national and World Cup events.

Zooming out from the Comox Valley, the full reach of the coastal British Columbia scene comes into view. Across the Salish Sea, Brad and Patricia Winchell both serve on the qathet Regional Cycling Association board of directors in Powell River. The organization is leading a major project to expand the Mount Mahony trail network. Not only is the initiative growing tourism, but it's also producing a new crop of racers, including Brad and Patricia's daughter, 17-year-old Ellie Winchell. She joined Team Canada at both the 2024 cross country world championships and Pan Am championships.

Gracey Hemstreet grew up farther down the coast in Sechelt, B.C. With ready access to Coast Gravity Park, largely built by her father, she's developed into one of Canada's top downhill racers. At just 20 years old, she is racing UCI elite DH. In 2024, she became the first woman to complete a Red Bull Hardline race lap, and won Hardline in her category this past February in Tasmania.

SUZUKI
Red Bull Hardline

ABOVE
Gracey Hemstreet at RedBull Hardline 2025

OPPOSITE TOP
Centre National de Cyclisme de Bromont's velodrome and pump track

OPPOSITE BOTTOM
Magdeleine Vallières Mill at the 2024 Canadian road championships

SHERBROOKE AND THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS, QUEBEC

Magdeleine Vallières Mill had an unorthodox introduction to cycling. When she was just eight years old, her dad bought her a bicycle and set out an audacious plan to ride from Sherbrooke to Gaspesie the following summer. It was a 1,000-km bike tour that would take nine days.

In the years that followed, she grew into the rider who is now a key part of EF Education-Oatly's Grand Tour squad and who sometimes gets opportunities to race for herself. In 2024, she snagged a win at the one-day Trofeo Palma Femina. She's still quick to admit that going pro wasn't part of a plan. In her youth, she didn't even realize cycling was a viable career, but she attributes her community and the local terrain to her ascent onto the world stage.

"I didn't race too much until high school," said Mills, "when I joined a high school sports program that was focused on cycling."

Between training with her school program and joining the Club Cycliste de Sherbrooke, her life began to revolve around bicycles.

"Everyone was racing cyclocross and mountain bikes, including my whole family," Vallières Mill said," so we were racing all over Quebec, but I was still mostly riding mountain bikes. At some point, I wanted to start racing a bit more road."

The local landscape compares favourably to the Ardennes. The climbs aren't long, but they're steep and often have gradients averaging 10 per cent, offering a natural training environment. Throughout the summer, these climbs weren't just reserved for intervals. They became a proving ground during Wednesday group rides. "The goal was to go as hard as you could," Vallières Mill said. "Every climb was a hill climb finish and the group would get smaller with every hill."

Throughout her childhood, Vallières Mill idolized Lyne Bessette. Hailing from nearby Knowlton, Bessette enjoyed a professional race career with Saturn Cycling Team and Team T-Mobile Women, winning the 1999 Tour de l'Aude. She also piloted paracyclist Robbi Weldon's gold-medal wins at the 2010 paracycling world championships and 2012 summer paralympics women's road race B. In 2013, Bessette had retired from elite racing, and later turned her focus to politics. In 2019, she became a Liberal Member of Parliament for the Brome-Missisquoi riding, serving until 2021. Today, Bessette organizes the annual Les 100 à B7 gravel race.

The area is also home to Bromont, Que., which features a rich mountain bike legacy. While it's almost been 16 years since Geoff Kabush won the 2009 Bromont World Cup, the mountain bike scene has never been stronger. Pittstop Vélo-Café sponsors the Pittstop Racing Team with local Laurie Arsenault. In September, the area will host the Canadian enduro MTB championships. The Velodrome Sylvan Adams is operated by the Centre National de Cyclisme de Bromont, drawing more aspiring cyclists into formal training environments.

While Vallières Mill is just one of the few professionals from Quebec's Eastern Townships racing at the sport's highest level today, others have been close. Julien Gagné raced on continental teams from 2014–23, achieving a sixth-place GC spot at the Tour de Beauce with Team Skyline in his final year on the road. He shifted to gravel racing this past season.

The region is likely to send more riders to the top ranks soon. "The high school program is still there," Vallières Mill said. "There were only five of us when I started, and now there are 20. I cannot wait to see who comes next."

Photo: Brett Hemmings/RedBull Content Pool

Photos: Alexandra Racine, Grégoire Crevier

OTTAWA, ONTARIO

According to Michael Woods, it's no coincidence that many of Canada's top road cyclists learned their race craft in Ottawa and across the river in Gatineau. The talent pool runs deep. Derek Gee (from Osgoode, 40 km to the south, but was supported by people in the city) rides alongside Woods on Israel Premier-Tech, where Alex Cataford has transitioned from cyclist to assistant sports director. Former pros Gordon Fraser and Brian Walton continue as assistant sports directors in Project Echelon Racing and Team Ecoflio Chronos, respectively.

"We are all a product of the community builders and the racing in Ottawa," Woods said. "Aside from the climate, which isn't great, it's just one of the best places to ride a bike."

As the National Capital Region, the area benefits from excellent funding. The National Capital Commission has a mandate to plan and steward federal lands, along with acting as a partner committed to development and conservation. From the Capital Pathway to Gatineau Park, many of the organization's initiatives have benefitted the cycling community.

Beyond the infrastructure, dedicated community builders have collaborated to create a strong racing scene. Woods credits Rob Orange and Vince Caceres, the CEO of The Cyclery, for their prominent roles in developing opportunities for competition.

"They put on a great Tuesday night race in Gatineau Park," Woods said, "and Vince put on a crit every other Wednesday. On Thursdays, there was a time trial on the Aviation Parkway." These events also serve as stepping stones for riders pursuing more ambitious goals and bigger races. Ottawa's location is favourable to racing, too, with fairly easy access to the best events in Ontario and Quebec. Woods pointed out that it is also within driving distance of continental races in the northeast U.S.

"Even when I made it to Optum," Woods said, referring to his 2015 third-division team, Optum presented by Kelly Benefit Strategies, "I still had people push me in Ottawa. There was always a young rider coming up, and you could really get essential race skills that you can't replicate in training."

Almost a year after Woods's Canadian teammate, Hugo Houle, won Stage 16 of the 2022 Tour de France, the Ottawa rider climbed to a career-defining win on Puy de Dôme. With the victory, he became Canada's third Tour de France stage winner and the result was celebrated across Ottawa.

"Early on, I never expected to win a Tour de France stage," Woods said. "My goal was just to make the Olympics, and I was blissfully ignorant of the sport, but it did soon become a goal when I started racing. To have won that stage, it's not just a product of my hard work, but also the entire Ottawa cycling community. They can take some ownership of that success."

LEFT
Time trialling in the National Capital Region's Gatineau Park

> "TO HAVE WON THAT STAGE, IT'S NOT JUST A PRODUCT OF MY HARD WORK, BUT ALSO THE ENTIRE OTTAWA CYCLING COMMUNITY. THEY CAN TAKE SOME OWNERSHIP OF THAT SUCCESS."

Photo: Grégoire Crevier

NEW BRUNSWICK

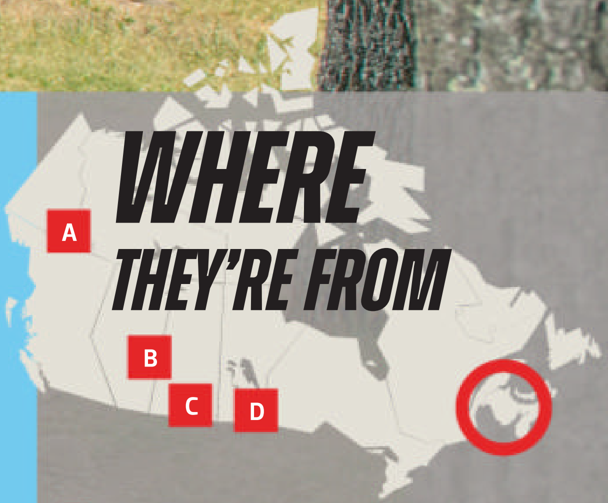
TAKES OVER TEAM CANADA AT THE MOUNTAIN BIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

IN 2004, New Brunswick sent an unprecedented number of athletes to the mountain bike world championships in Les Gets, France. The group included Catharine Pendrel, Eric Goss, Matt Hadley, Peter Wedge and Geoff Pendrel. Karen DeWolfe, from Nova Scotia, rounded out the Maritime representation.

"You see these performance clusters," Catharine Pendrel said. "When a training group gets super strong and focused, lots of success can come from the same area."

The event was Pendrel's first time racing internationally, but it marked the beginning of a strong career. In the women's elite XC, Canadian Alison Sydor won the bronze medal, while Pendrel finished in 46th place. In 2010, Pendrel won the World Cup series overall, and would repeat that feat in 2012 and 2016. Her first world championship win came in 2011, seven years after her debut at Les Gets. She got another world championship title in 2014.

WHERE THEY'RE FROM



A **Zach Bell**, two-time silver medallist at the track cycling world championships in the omnium, grew up in Watson Lake, Yukon. B **Alison Jackson** hails from Vermilion, Alta. C **Rob Britton**, winner of the 2017 Tour of Utah and current gravel racer, is from Regina. D Olympian, national champion and stage winner at the Giro d'Italia Internazionale Femminile **Leah Kirchmann** is a Winnipegger.

TREK
AURORA | BARRIE
SHIMANO
FOX

BARRIE, ONTARIO

Few cities in Canada can boast the off-road pedigree of Barrie, Ont. Both current xco champions, Jenn Jackson (Orbea Fox Factory) and Cole Punchard (Cannondale Factory Racing), grew up in the region. (Punchard is from Huntsville, 125 km north of Barrie.) Former national champions Quinton and Peter Disera are also from the area, but it's the Holmgren siblings—Gunnar, Isabella and Ava—and family friend Ian Ackert who show that the town isn't slowing down.

"I think the credit would go to the Hardwood Wednesday night race series," Rob Holmgren said, citing the events at Hardwood Ski and Bike, which has hosted multiple Canada Cups and national cross country championships, as well as the 2015 Pan Am Games. "There are 17 races every summer and it was always the highlight of the week."

This summer, the Hardwood Wednesday night series celebrates its 30th anniversary. While it's a few years past its peak, when Rob Holmgren remembers nearly 300 people competing each week, these races still draw more than 100 cyclists every session.

As the Holmgren family began climbing the local ranks, a weekly cyclocross series began to complement the mountain bike events. Soon, the entire bicycle scene was thriving with the Simcoe Valley Mountain Bike Club leading trail development across the area.

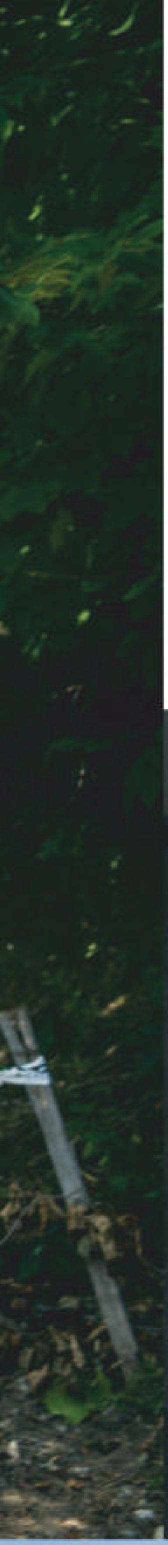
"It's just a world-class training area," Holmgren said. "The roads are quiet and safe, and we have an incredible trail network. For cycling, it's full-service. You can train any discipline and gain skills."

As the family started competing nationally and internationally, Barrie also played a pivotal role in their race access. "I think the challenges are the same as anywhere in Canada," Holmgren said. "Every time we get in the car to go to a race, it's six to 12 hours away. At least we could be at Toronto's Pearson airport in less than an hour."

With Ava and Isabella racing with Lidl-Trek and Gunnar competing for Trek Factory Racing, the family spends less time in Barrie than ever. Anytime they're home for a visit, the Friday morning ride that leaves from the Holmgren house remains a highlight.

"It's a road bike ride with a bunch of masters and kids mixed together," Holmgren said, "It's always been good for teaching the kids and masters ride etiquette. We have blue-sign sprints and the unofficial finish line at the tip of the S-Hill Strava segment. Even when the girls were 14, they would challenge all the riders for the win."

Photo: Matt Stetson



OPPOSITE
Jenn Jackson, 2022 Canadian XC championships, Hardwood Ski and Bike

BELOW
U.S. rider Bobby Julich raced in northern Quebec, winning the 1989 Tour de l'Abitibi

BOTTOM
Olivia Baril, 2023 TT world championships

ABITIBI-TÉMISCAMINGUE REGION, QUEBEC

The Abitibi-Témiscamingue Region is not a place you'd expect to find a thriving road scene. It's located in northwest Quebec, about 400 km due north of Ontario's Algonquin Provincial Park. Former Bloc Quebecois MP for the area and current president of the UCI's arbitral board Marc Lemay has joked that because of its remoteness, it's practically the North Pole. Yet, the region's communities of Amos, Rouyn-Norada and Val-d'Or have influenced Canadian cycling for generations.

There's the annual Tour de l'Abitibi, one of the longest running cycling races in Canada, which has featured junior men for most of its existence. A list of stars-before-they-were-stars who rode Abitibi includes Brandon McNulty, Derek Gee, Bobby Julich, Tyler Farrar, Lachlan Morton and Alex Stieda. This summer marks its 55th anniversary, but this year's event begins with a new tradition: the first-ever women's Tour de l'Abitibi starts on July 11.

Canada
Canada
MET
MAPEI
COLNAGO
UAE
MICHE

Photos: Courtesy Tour de l'Abitibi, Stefano Sirroti

Before Marc Lemay was an MP, he built a career in cycling. He was the technical director for Abitibi in its early years, before becoming the president of the Fédération québecoise des sports cyclistes and later the Canadian Cycling Association. From 1991–2001, he served as the president of the UCI's mountain bike commission. He's largely credited with establishing XCO as an Olympic sport.

While his legacy helped grow cycling around the world, there's still a lot of work done at grassroots level at home. Keven Lacombe, Karol-Ann Canuel and Pierrick Naud have retired, but they each had impressive professional careers. Naud raced alongside Woods and Guillaume Boivin with Optum presented by Kelly Benefit Strategies and continued as it became Rally Cycling. Canuel had a prominent career with Boels-Dolmans Cycling and SD Worx that included two ITT and one road national championship. Currently, she's the director of the Tour of Gatineau.

Keven Lacombe, who finished his career following the close of Spidertech powered by C10 in 2012, remained in the region and continues to contribute to the next generation. "After he retired, Keven was mentoring my junior team," said Olivia Baril, who's from Rouyn-Noranda and races for Movistar. "I didn't even understand who he was because I was so new to the sport, but he really contributed to our development and invested to start a training centre that is still going on." Baril represents the pinnacle of the current generation. Making it to the WorldTour didn't come easy, but early support from the junior club Iamgold and mentorship from Lacombe set her on the right path.

"The area is really flat," Baril said. "The longest climb I had close to my house was only a 30-second climb, but training there is still useful. If I did a two-hour training ride, I would pedal for the whole two hours. It's perfect for endurance."

When COVID shutdowns paused Baril's college career, she saved money and ultimately moved to San Sebastian, Spain, with her then boyfriend Charles-Étienne Chrétien from Amos, where they both hoped to take the next step in their careers.

"I couldn't have done it without him," Baril said. "He really believed in me and felt I was super strong. He was the only one that felt I could really make it."

All of the current Canadian cycling hot spots have strong communities at their cores. But sometimes a community can be as small as the pair from a remote part of Canada, helping each other within the global sport.

Vancouver's Master Mountain Bike Craftsman

For more than 30 years, **Chris Dekerf** has been building frames and components that not only push his skills to new heights, but take bike design into new directions

by **Robin Black**

Photos: Courtesy Dekerf

I have a confession: I joined the Dekerf fan club 16 years ago. I was fortunate enough to acquire one of the legendary ST softail frames by Chris Dekerf, the frame builder from Vancouver. This stunning handcrafted Reynolds 853 frame features impeccable welds, a beautiful yet durable paint job, the signature Dekerf wishbone stay design and titanium chainstays that flex to provide an inch of rear travel. It's not quite suspension, but the design offers one of the liveliest, most responsive rides I've ever experienced. I get a lot of double takes when I bring my 1999 Dekerf to the trail alongside my full-suspension bike, 15 years its junior. (One rider recently asked of the ST softail: "Is that a gravel bike?") But I love rediscovering the sheer pleasure of piloting this nimble 10-kg rocket. It's the bike that veteran cycling journalist Mike Ferrentino called "the best handling bike in the world" in his 1999 review for *Bike Magazine*.

Before I spoke with Dekerf this past winter, he emailed to ask if we could push back our call by 30 minutes. Later, he revealed the reason: he was deep into crafting a custom 29" titanium fork—a project that speaks to his focus on technical precision and continuous improvement. This fork features externally machined (butted) titanium legs to reduce weight and enhance ride quality, paired with a robust, elegant double-pass welding technique he developed to join the fork and crown. This work is one part of Dekerf's business, a one-person operation spanning 35 years with more than 12,000 steel and titanium bikes built.

Few in Canada's cycling industry have witnessed as much as Dekerf. He's been a part of the scene since mountain biking's heyday, building some of the first Rocky Mountain frames, along with other brands, such as Cove, Off-Road Toad and Race Face, where he designed stems. In early 1989, he worked at the Toyo Frame Factory in Kashiwara City, Japan, a place where many of the early frames by brands such as Specialized, GT and Gary Fisher were built. "This is where I learned what production frame work was all about," he said. "We worked 12-hour days, six-days a week. Meals were delivered to the factory. The only people who spoke English were the factory owner's son and, of course, me." He did production work at Rocky Mountain Bicycles, too, making close to 2,000 Blizzard frames in one eight-month period alone. He founded Dekerf Cycles in 1989 and started building his own high-end steel bikes in 1992. His early models included the coveted Team SL and ST steel mountain bikes, as well as the North Shore-inspired Implant, all sporting his unique signature wishbone rear end, a complex yet elegant seat-stay junction.

Dekerf's father inspired his son to build and passed on a strong work ethic. In the mountain bike world, Dekerf has been influenced by Tom Ritchey, a pioneer of mountain bike frame production, and Richard Sachs, a frame builder

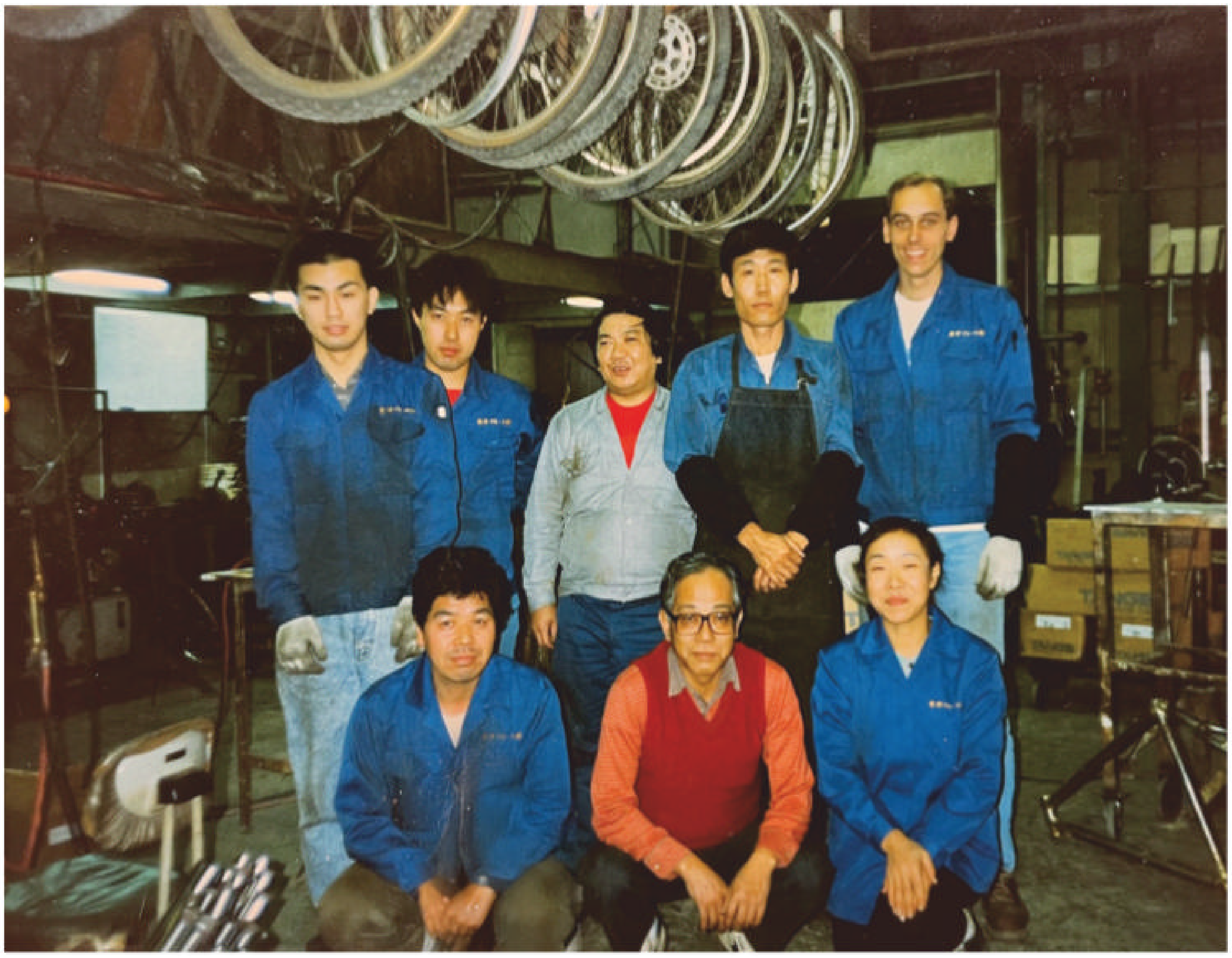
credited with laying the foundation of North America's hand-built bike scene. Derek Bailey, the British frame maker who built early Rocky Mountain bikes, also had an effect on Dekerf's development. Paul Brodie, who founded Brodie bikes a few years before Dekerf started his own project, is a contemporary from the Vancouver area. The pair were among the pioneers of the Canadian mountain bike industry and remain two of the oldest veterans in Canada's West Coast bike-building scene. "He and I are the two guys in the industry the longest," Brodie said, "and he's still in it. He's outdone me."

Not long after Dekerf started building his own bikes, he supported a team. Future Olympian in cross country Andreas Hestler joined the squad in 1993. "I toured North America, raced World Cups and Canada Cups that season. I eventually landed on the national team for the first time. The Dekerf bikes had everyone across the country truly agog," Hestler said. In particular, Hestler remembered Dekerf's bull-moose bars with three-strut stem. "It was that moment before full suspension, before front suspension, before disc brakes, when hardtails ruled the roost. Aluminum had barely made the scene, it was steel or titanium. Carbon was a few years away."

In the late 1990s, Dekerf briefly ventured in the emerging field of full-suspension bike designs (a Softride model, the ST softail, the Phenomenon and Team FS), but realized that his true passion lay in the craft of frame building, as opposed to the mechanical-engineering heavy world of dampers, axle paths and anti-squat. "I learned to stay in my lane," he said. He returned to steel hardtails, eventually incorporating titanium with a brief sojourn into aluminum and scandium. Today, titanium makes up around 60 per cent of his orders.

ABOVE
Dekerf in 1991 crafts the RMB Altitude in his first small shop in Vancouver

RIGHT
Dekerf and his colleagues at the Toyo Frame Factory in Kashiwara City, Japan, in 1989



"I definitely form a sort of connection to some of the more challenging builds, but I accepted long ago to not get too attached."

In the mid-2000s, he made a conscientious move toward focusing only on fully custom, one-off bikes—a shift he described as demanding but ultimately rewarding as it allows him to ensure that his standards are applied throughout the entire frame building process and to immerse himself in his work fully. "Working alone can be challenging at times and I do sometimes miss interacting with others," he said, "but I also believe I invariably do my best work when working alone. As the level of detail and complexity that my clients are looking for only seems to continue to go up, having that uninterrupted focus has become essential for me to do my very best work. It may not have been the best business decision—I'll never be a rich man—but it's far more satisfying as a craftsman." During these transition years, something was changing in his

Photos: Courtesy Dekerf

craft, with more complex builds tapping into his drive to innovate and refine his skills. A close friend of Dekerf's who's known him since he started out as a bike mechanic at West Point Cycles is industry vet Mark Norris. He's worked at Rocky Mountain, Schwinn, Specialized and RockShox. "Do you know anyone in the bike business who, after all these years, continues to keep innovating and honing their skills?" Norris asked. "This industry has lost track of what real innovation looks like. Chris embodies what it should be."

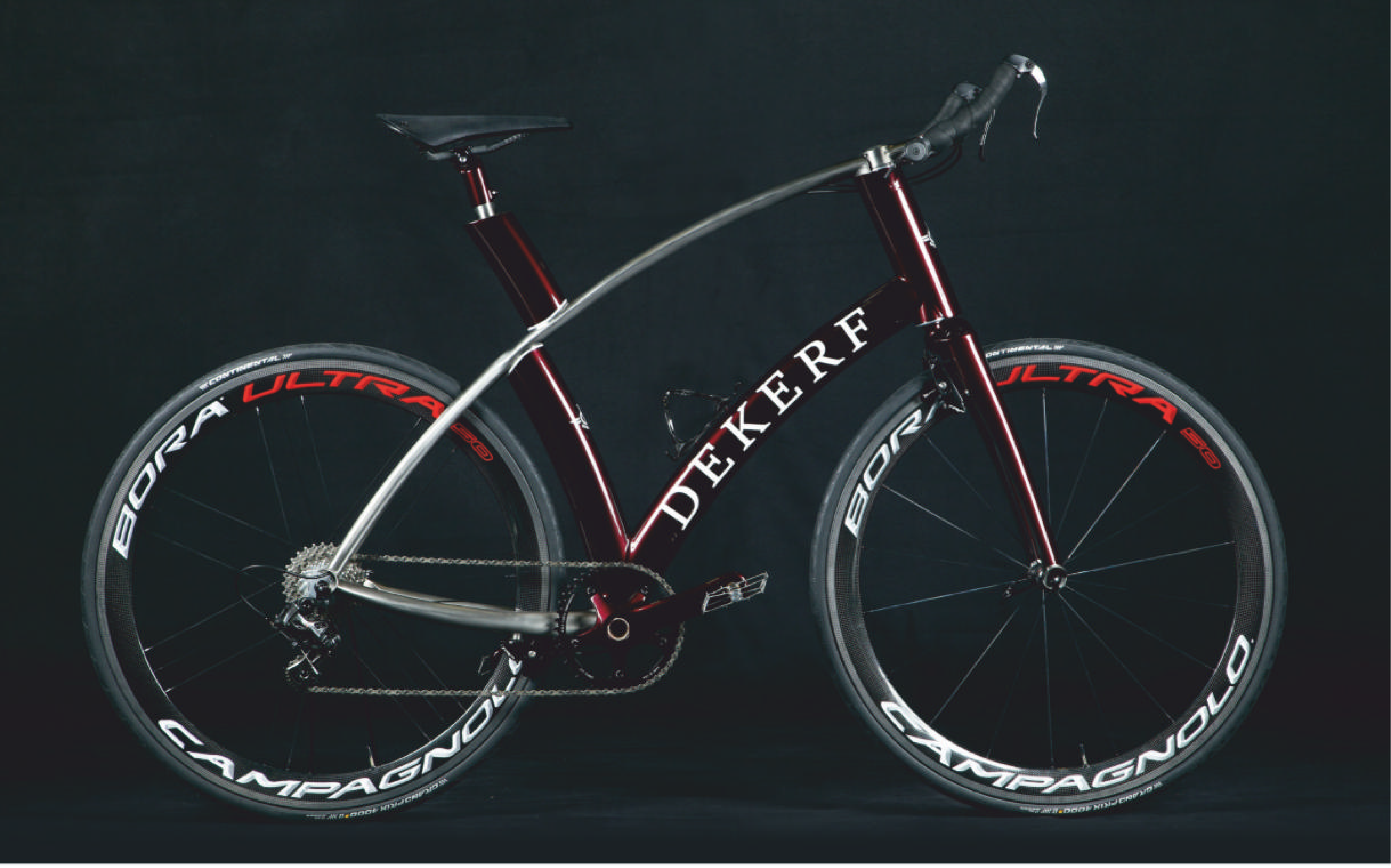
The road has been full of challenges. In 2006, feeling exhausted by the demands of the business and contemplating new paths for his skills, Dekerf nearly closed up shop. However, overwhelming support from clients and retailers changed his mind.

Dekerf occasionally takes on production runs for other companies, such as building batches of Whistler-based Chromag's Surface Voyager steel frames along with fulfilling orders from its custom-paint program. For him, production frame building might not be as interesting from an artistic or even a financial standpoint, but he said it helps him to maintain welding skills that are in fact only a small part of the process of designing and building bikes. His work focuses on one-off builds, including 29" hardtail mountain bikes, singlespeeds, touring road bikes and gravel bikes—unsurprisingly a popular category. He doesn't give bikes model names, reflecting his evolving approach. "I'll make pretty much anything, and the more challenging, the more I enjoy the process," he said. Dekerf now does all his painting too, another step he loves as it gives him a mode of expression beyond metal working.

I asked how he guides clients through the custom process and ensures their commitment to each build's final specs, given his openness to diverse projects. His laugh told me I was on to something. "Good question. I work with clients to determine how involved they want to be," he said. "Some know exactly what they want, while others welcome help with decisions on geometry, paint and even the finer details. Some frame builders are content with producing frames that are all rather similar. I like working with clients to make their bikes truly bespoke."

He thrives on the little things that show his care and precision. "I almost always add something they hadn't thought of, that extra detail that can be as simple as some final geometry tweaks to better suit the rider, or small cosmetic details," he said.

"Chris is an incredibly thoughtful guy," Norris said. "While he has his nose deeply in his work, it's never at the expense of the particular needs of his clients or anyone else he works with." Recently, Dekerf took on the daunting challenge of hand filing welds on a titanium frame build—a big task he embraced, as it was a new technique he'd never tried before. His signature features, such as his classic wishbone rear triangle junction or the front-end equivalent, the Tuning Fork, live on upon request. Beyond a bike's Dekerf decals, these elements are among the few



Team SST – 853 Hardtail XC
Dekerf Cycle Innovations
2006
dk
DEKERF

ABOVE
2006 Dekerf catalogue

TOP
Dekerf's 2016 NAHBS winning bike

OPPOSITE TOP
Dekerf custom bikepacking rig

that unify his diverse body of work visually.

Considering the level of work and attention he gives to every frame, I asked if it was hard to say goodbye to his creations. He chuckled again. "I definitely form a sort of connection to some of the more challenging builds, but I accepted long ago to not get too attached," he said. It helps that clients stay in touch, sometimes sending frames back for modifications or repaints.

With his decades of experience in the bike industry, I was curious about his take on the latest design trends, such as new (and constantly changing) standards, internal cable routing, aero frames and electronic drivetrains. "I don't really keep up with modern trends, but I've built frames with fully internal cables as the client requested," he said. For the routing, he developed a method for running continuous titanium housing through the frame, eliminating common routing issues.

Photos: Paul Skilbeck/HBG, Courtesy Dekerf

MAXXIS
IKON
pinion

Dekerf has crafted some stunning entries for handmade bike shows that showcase his full potential when given the time and resources. "All my show bikes are fully functional, built for clients," he said. The list includes his 2016 NAHBS Artisan Award-winning bike—a swooping, sloping titanium masterpiece that took more than 500 hours to complete. "They're not an example of what I do everyday, but of what I can do" he said of his complex builds.

In the past few years, Chris Dekerf the cyclist has stepped back from mountain biking, now logging most of his kilometres during his 50-minute commute to his workshop in Richmond, B.C., on a 20-year-old road bike he made. For now, his connection to cycling revolves around crafting clients' dream builds, one frame at a time.

As I near 50, I realized my aging body needed a modern MTB with more travel, wider tires and forgiving geometry. Parked next to my Dekerf, my new ride highlights undeniable advancements in bike tech. Its 29" wheels, stiff long-travel fork and thick yet light aluminum tubes dwarf the sleek Dekerf beside it. For a moment, I considered selling the Dekerf—a practical choice given my new bike and the ST's resale value. I realize too that it is a snapshot of a particular era in a vaunted frame builder's career, one he's moved far beyond in artisanry. But sanity prevails: the Dekerf will always have a place in my quiver—a piece of frame-building mastery that's also pure joy to ride.

Photos: Courtesy Dekerf

FEATURE

ESSENTIAL ADVICE FOR BUYING A NEW BIKE AND COMPONENTS

Tips for picking the right road, gravel, mountain or ebike for you, as well the right accessories

Planning on buying a new bike this year? Great. Not only are we sharing the best bikes across a range of budgets in this issue, we wanted to talk with experts about how to choose the one that's right for you—even for those of you who have racked up thousands of kilometres. Let's be honest: it's easy to fall in love with a shiny bike that happens to be in our favourite colour, even if it's the completely wrong geometry for our specific needs. Here's advice on how to avoid that mistake, as well as tips that will guide you not only to the best bike for you, but also other key components, such as saddles, handlebars and cranks.

by **Molly Hurford**

Finding the right bike for you

ROAD BIKE

With a variety of road bikes on the market with seemingly tiny differences from bike to bike, it can be hard to know what to look for. Should you opt for a bike that claims to be designed for endurance, or do you need a racer's geometry?

"I always say when picking a bike, you need three things: self-awareness, knowledge of your past injuries and pain points on the bike, and a little bit of knowledge about bikes," says Alyssa Hillaby, a registered physiotherapist and bike fitter at Physio Bike Fitter in Ottawa. "If you're 60 and you can't touch your toes, your hips really don't bend well and you have a history of lower back pain, a bike designed for aggressive road racing isn't going to make you faster, it's going to slow you down because you'll be uncomfortable and won't be able to make the most of its geometry."

"Ultimately, you are the biggest drag on your bike. So if you're going to be more aero on a more relaxed endurance bike, it'll be faster than any aero bike for you," she adds.

When in doubt, Tim Plunkett, lead bike fitter and co-owner of Speed River Bicycle in Guelph, Ont., suggests opting for versatility, which is, generally speaking, an endurance road bike that can fit at least 35c tires, if not 40-mm-wide treads. "Once you have that bike that can handle most things, your next bike can be something racier if you decide you want to race. But start with something that's versatile."

When it comes to size, Hillaby notes that most people fit on two frame sizes, so you'll have to make a decision based on your preferences (or what the shop has in stock). "Almost everyone is going to fit a slightly bigger frame and a slightly smaller frame, and then we adjust saddle height, stem length and everything else accordingly," she says. "So if it's a big frame, maybe we need a shorter stem and your seat is going to be a bit low."

Proceed with caution if you are looking at a bike with an integrated bar and stem. The bar/stem combo, especially if it's a proprietary component, could limit your fit options. Most brands, however, ensure they make a variety of sizes, so you can achieve the right reach on the tops and in the drops.

GRAVEL BIKE

Similar to road bikes, gravel bikes are now starting to segment into race-oriented models and more versatile options for the explorer or bikepacker. With a gravel bike, you not only want to look at the geometry, but also the features on the frame. The more adventure-style bikes will likely have the ability to attach fenders and mount different types of bikepacking bags and bottle cages, while gravel race bikes will be a bit more streamlined with a slightly more aggressive geometries.

"I always ask riders to think about not just their big goals, but also about what type of riding they'll be doing most of the time," Plunkett says. "Too often, people buy bikes for a bucket-list event, and forget that the other 99 per cent of the time, a different bike would actually suit them better." He also notes that it's much easier to make an explorer-style gravel bike more race-friendly by dropping the handlebars and swapping some components, but it's much harder to make a racing bike into something more comfortable or ready for a bikepacking trip.

Neil Gold, national sales manager at Cannondale based in Collingwood, Ont., says that there is a third type of gravel bike gaining popularity, the extreme adventure type of rig that has a dropper post, fits wider tires and has a multitude of ways to store gear. Such a bike is for the rider tackling serious, rugged bikepacking adventures, and may be less-than-ideal for the casual gravel group ride in town.

RAPHA
RAPHA

Photos: Matt Stetson

MOUNTAIN BIKE

Mountain biking is now a long, long way from the early days of clunkers. The bikes are quite specific for whatever flavour of riding you'd like to do. Do you need a cross country, trail, enduro or downhill bike? Is travel the most important number? What wheel size should you choose? Or, should you choose a mix of wheel sizes? Is a hardtail a viable option? Books could be written about the topic, so let's start with the best tip: do your research (you're well on your way with this article) and find a local bike shop where the staff actually listens to you as you explain where you ride and how you want to ride. The staff will be best equipped to offer recommendations based on the terrain you want to tackle and your personal pain points on the bike.

"Most riders just want to find a mountain bike that feels stable and makes them feel confident on the trail because they're probably not going to mountain bike very often if they're pooping themselves while going down the hill," Hillaby says, using quite the scatological image, but you get the idea.

A newer rider on highly technical trails may prefer the comfort and capabilities of a long-travel bike over big rocks and roots, while a more veteran racer may navigate the same singletrack with speed and ease on a lightweight XC racing bike.

The good news, says Gold, is that a new genre of mountain bike has been emerging: a lighter trail bike with ample travel, better suspension and a smoother ride compared with its racier counterparts. "The reality is that now you can have a trail bike do everything from racing cross country to tackling really tricky singletrack or even doing a local enduro," he says. "Yes, they're still a little pricey, but for the capabilities they now offer, they're a great deal."

For wheel size, he adds that the 27.5" wheel has really faded in the market. (You will, however, see rigs sporting a 27.5" wheel at the back, to boost handling, and a 29" hoop at the front for maximum rollover abilities.) Currently, 29ers are once again the norm. Hillaby notes that it's wise to consider your entire family's bike collection to try to standardize wheel sizes so you can potentially swap wheelsets.

EBIKE

There are ebike options for every type of bike you could own. Assuming you know what type of ebike you want (commuter, MTB, road or gravel), what should you pay attention to as you look at the specs?

"There are basically three categories of ebikes available now that ride very well, have modern geometry and give you the confidence to do everything you would normally do on a bike," Gold says. "There are lightweight ebikes, which typically have less power to propel them forward, usually a 400-Wh (watt-hour) battery. They only provide 55 to 60 Nm (Newton-metres) of assistance. Then, there are full-power ebikes, which have a 600-Wh battery or greater, and 85 Nm of assistance. These are the bikes that will provide power for your entire ride, not just up a few of the hills. Finally, there are the bikes that are lightweight and have high-power, and those are the really expensive ones."

Again, it's important to think about what you want

Photos: Nick Iwanyshyn, Matt Stetson

Photo: Matt Stetson

for your ride. Are you trying to keep up with the group and only need help on a few of the hills? A lightweight model with limited power might be the answer. If you're looking for multiple hours of assistance so you can explore far-flung mountain bike trails, you'll need to look at the full-power options.

In the ebike market, Gold suggests avoiding non-name brand batteries or any proprietary motors. "Yes, you may have to pay more for a Shimano-equipped bike or a Bosch-equipped bike, but you'll also have support globally from those companies. You'll also have the ability to use their apps to do a diagnostic on your bike, to set power-assist modes and to check the battery health," he explains.

WOMEN'S BIKES

TL;DR: you don't need a bike specifically designed for a woman. And spoiler alert: most of them are just the same frame in different colours and size ranges with slightly different saddles and handlebars. You're better served basing your choice on the geometry of the bike and how it fits you, Hillaby says. That could still mean you do end up with a bike from a women's brand like Liv or Julianna, but it's just as likely you end up on a Specialized or a Trek. You may need to change out the saddle or handlebars to maximize comfort.

Hillaby does note that unfortunately, as many brands have gone back to offering bikes that aren't gender-specific, they've done away with some of the smallest sizes. If you're a short woman (or man), you may find fewer options to choose from.

5 top bike-buying tips

- Buy a bike at the lower end of your budget so that you can afford to swap saddles, get a professional bike fit and buy any of the other extras you might want. "If you spend less on the bike, you have cash to spend on all the other things that are arguably more important, especially in the first couple of years as a cyclist," Gold says. "You can get the right shorts, saddle, shoes, winter riding gear and helmet. When you have all the appropriate tools to go along with the bike, it's a much better experience."

- Do your homework before you go to your local bike shop, says Hillaby. Go online to check your dream bike's recommended frame size for you based on your measurements. (Screenshot it so you have a reference when you get to the store.)

- If it feels "off" during the test ride, don't buy it. Yes, there's some tweaking that can be done in a bike fit, but if you can't find a position that feels decent from the start, the bike likely isn't the right fit for you, says Hillaby. You shouldn't be feeling like you're at the extremes of your comfort or fit "Do you have to slam the saddle all the way down? Do you feel like you're Superman with your hands straight out reaching forward in order to hold the bars? If so, the bike is too big. We can't shrink or grow a bike." The "off" feeling also applies to bike-shop vibes: if you feel like you're being pressured into purchasing, walk away.

- Ask about swaps and upgrades, adds Plunkett. Some bike shops will work with you to make a sale happen, changing the saddle that comes on the bike to one that fits you better, or offering a complimentary basic bike fit.

- "Strong. Light. Cheap. Pick Two" is Keith Bontrager's enduring aphorism. Cheap is relative, of course, but ultimately, if a deal seems too good to be true, you'll likely pay another price down the road.

Optimizing your touchpoints

When you buy a bike, it's tempting to assume that you're good with the components that came stock. But swapping out things like the saddle or crankarms can make a major difference when it comes to comfort.

SADDLE

Because the saddle is your primary point of contact on the bike, it's the piece that matters the most. There are a lot of levers you can pull when it comes to saddle comfort, from saddle height to saddle fore/aft (how far forward or back is it) and, of course, the saddle size and style itself.

"Often, I see that the saddle is fine, but the saddle height is wrong," Plunkett says. "If you have an uncomfortable saddle, it's made more uncomfortable if the saddle is too high." He suggests taking a video of yourself riding the trainer, shot from the side. Can you see centimetres of saddle behind your butt? That's a red flag because the space means you're shifting forward to avoid some kind of pressure. As a result, you're riding entirely on the nose of the saddle. Take a look at your pedal stroke as well. Are you pointing your toes down in order to move the crank around? Plunkett says often, people have their saddles set too high. He recommends checking that you can get your heel on the pedal in its lowest position while sitting on the saddle, which indicates you have the height right.

When purchasing a new saddle, Hillaby suggests checking the return policy. Most shops can help you find a saddle that's in the right size range for you based on your sit-bone width. From there, the possibilities might seem endless. Some people love cut-outs, others find them painful. Unfortunately, there's no direct correlation between saddle type and—ahem—nether region setup.

"You have to test different saddles," Hillaby says. "As you ride on a new saddle, pay close attention. Are you getting numb? Does that happen because there's no cut-out, or because the nose is so narrow that it's pressing on your soft tissue? You may need a different cut-out or channel. Are you feeling uncomfortable rubbing on a taper point? That can indicate that your saddle's nose is too wide. Does it feel like your sit bones are rocking? The saddle may be too small. Write down these observations because they can be helpful as you're shopping for a new saddle or getting a bike fit. The goal is to find a saddle that feels like a firm bench with even pressure everywhere."

HANDLEBARS

"The bare minimum for anyone when they're on a drop-bar bike is that they have to be able to spend the majority of your time with their hands on the hoods comfortably," Plunkett says. "I see too many people who end up putting their hands on the tops in order to be comfortable, but that's a sign something needs to change. That's not safe, and it's not the right fit."

Sometimes the fix is simply moving the levers to a more comfortable position, one that lets you keep your hands on the hoods with your wrists straight and your arms engaged but relaxed and not twisted in an awkward direction. "We want a relatively straight line from thumb to shoulder," says Hillaby. Like your saddle, you can also change where the bars sit in relation to your body: you may need to raise or lower your handlebar height, or change your stem to allow for more or less reach to the bars.

But the bars themselves may also be too wide or narrow for your body type. The bars that come stock on a bike are the ones that are most likely to fit the majority of riders, but depending on your shoulder width, you may need a wider or narrower bar. Hillaby suggests measuring your shoulder width in the front and choosing a handlebar width that's a similar length, which is the standard way of sizing drop bars. The current trend in aero road bikes is spec'ing bars that are narrower at the hoods and slightly wider at the hooks.

On the mountain bike, bars have become wider over time, but you may find that the wide bars simply aren't comfortable for you. Shaving off a few centimetres could make you feel much more in control. "There are no absolutes. It's a lot about personal preference," Plunkett says. "The goal is to find a handlebar setup that lets your upper body feel soft and relaxed."

Finally, Hillaby suggests that smaller-handed road riders also check on their hood size: longer hoods can be harder to grip. She also notes that electronic shifting and hydraulic braking should be high on your list of wants when bike shopping, since those both go a long way to making life easy for smaller-handed riders to change gears and stop.

Photos: Matt Stetson

> **"I ALWAYS ASK RIDERS TO THINK ABOUT NOT JUST THEIR BIG GOALS, BUT ALSO ABOUT WHAT TYPE OF RIDING THEY'LL BE DOING MOST OF THE TIME."**

CRANKARMS

The winners of the past five Tours de France, Tadej Pogačar and Jonas Vingegaard, seem to be in a crankarms race. Pogačar dropped to 165-mm-long cranks in 2024. This season, it appears Vingegaard is running 150-mm cranks. As such, crankarm length has become a bigger conversation. Hillaby and Plunkett both wonder why it took this long to talk about it.

"People used to assume that longer crankarms resulted in more torque, since torque is calculated by the force multiplied by the lever arm, so a longer lever arm would mean more force," Hillaby says. "But what they didn't think about is how our bodies actually work and how that force production is affected over time. When we have shorter crankarms, it's easier to spin faster. Maybe we're sacrificing a little bit of power in an instantaneous moment, but throughout 30 seconds to a minute, we are actually going to have better power because we have higher cadence with less effort, because our joints aren't moving as much."

Crank length becomes even more important for shorter riders. "If you think of a 170-mm-long crankarm, that might be as long as a short person's femur," she explains. "If we think of the size of the circle they're pedalling, it's massive for them. To accommodate for that, they're going to have to bend at the knee and hip much more. For a woman with a 170-mm crankarm, that could mean that their knees are almost hitting their breasts, and their chest is feeling compressed, so now they're unable to get into the drops. But if they switched to a 160-mm crankarm, that circle they're pedalling becomes much smaller and gives them space." She adds that the difference of 10 mm in crankarm length is actually equal to a whopping 6 cm of difference in the pedal stroke. (Thanks, mathematics!)

If you've never considered your crankarm length but deal with hip, knee or lower-back pain, or know that you're lacking in flexibility and mobility, it may be worth contemplating a change—even if you're not a shorter rider. Plunkett has found that many of his taller cyclists have benefitted from shorter crankarms to help with mobility limitations. Hillaby says the right length of crankarm can make a bike actually fit you, rather than forcing you to change how your body moves in order to accommodate the bike.

Can it be fixed with a bike fit?

If you're reading this guide because you think you need a new bike because your current rig is just plain uncomfortable, it might be worth considering a bike fit before giving up on your bike entirely. "I always say that people are so much better off when they opt for the less expensive bike that allows them to invest in a bike fit," Plunkett says.

"Unfortunately, we're conditioned to think that cycling is about ignoring sensations, including pain, but cycling shouldn't hurt," he explains. "There's a difference between fatigue from a hard ride and pain that causes a foot to go numb or that leaves you with saddle sores." His first piece of advice is to start becoming aware of how you're feeling during your ride.

Do you have any discomfort or pain points? If you do, start with some saddle adjustments at home to see if they make a difference. "In my experience, a lot of issues flow from the saddle, into your back, down to the feet and to your hands," Plunkett adds. "The wrong seat height, a saddle that's set too far back or forward, or simply the wrong type of saddle for you can change the entire fit of the bike." (This trial-and-error process is helpful when you do see a bike fitter, so they know what you've tried and what has or hasn't worked.)

Bear in mind that your bike fit from bike to bike won't be the same. Whether you've switched brands for your road bike or switched to a gravel bike, expect to have some changes between bike fits. Because each frame is slightly different, from angles to tube lengths, a saddle height that works on your road bike may be a few millimetres higher or lower than what works on your gravel bike.

And finally, you change throughout the years. You become more or less flexible. You gain strength or lose it. Life changes, like pregnancy or injury, can greatly affect your bike fit. As Hillaby puts it: "You don't stay the same, so why would your bike fit?"

Whether you're upgrading your old steed or getting a shiny new rig, make sure everything fits, just right.

Cycling has always been there...

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BUYER'S GUIDE 2025

Road & Gravel

Road Racing p.48
All-Road p.50
Road Price Point p.51
Gravel Race p.52
Gravel Adventure p.53
Gravel Price Point p.54
eRoad and eGravel p.56
eCommuter and eCargo p.57
Road Wheels p.58
Gravel Wheels p.60
Road Tires p.62
Gravel Tires p.63

Trail

MTB Dream Machines p.64
MTB Performance p.66
MTB Price Point p.68
eMTB p.70
Fat Bikes p.71
Mountain Bike Wheels p.72
Mountain Bike Tires p.74

RAPID FIRE

Mountain Bike Shoes p.75
Gravel Shoes p.76
MTB and Gravel Pedals p.77
Road Shoes p.78
Road Pedals p.79
Saddles p.80
Bike Computers p.81
Dropper Posts p.82
MTB Forks p.83

Photo: Hiep Vu

Trek Madone SLR 9 Gen 8 $22,000

Marking a shift in Trek's lineup, the eighth-generation Madone replaces its predecessor along with the outgoing lightweight climber, Émonda. Gone are the dramatic aero tube shapes of earlier Madones in favour of a slimmer frame using Trek's top-end 900 Series OCLV carbon-fibre formula. The company says the latest Madone is as aero as the Gen 7 bike when combined with the new RSL aero bottles and cages. IsoFlow, the exhaust port in the seat tube, returns to add compliance for the rider. Up front, there's a new one-piece aero handlebar for better ergonomics. Five stock paint schemes are offered, and for an extra $4,500, this stunning mirrored Chroma Interstellar design. (*trekbikes.com*)

No. 22 Reactor Aero US$15,000 (frameset)

While the Reactor Aero is currently in its prototype phase—with its planned release late in 2025—No. 22 has 3D printed the new bike. The company says the new frame has a 30 to 40 per cent aerodynamic advantage on its current Reactor and Aurora models. The freedom in 3D printing methods have allowed for increased stiffness in the down tube for power transfer, while maintaining titanium's renowned ride quality. Frameset weight is TBD, however, confirmed is how much lighter your wallet will be after forking over the US$10,000 to US$15,000 for the frame, fork and headset. Expect a final production model to clear 34-mm-wide tires and sport a T47 bottom bracket, with seven sizes ranging from 48 to 60 cm. (*22bicycles.com*)

Scott Addict RC 20 $8,499

The Addict was born in 2007 and anointed the lightest race bike in the pro peloton at the time. The latest Addict, in the RC 20 build, weighs a scant 7.3 kg with Shimano Ultegra Di2 spec, 30-mm-wide tires and alloy stem. In order to shave an impressive 300-g from the last Addict, Scott's engineers modified their mould and layup techniques. The bike's new geometry is still responsive, but now clears 34-mm tires. Each Addict includes a T25 tool hidden in the handlebar. It's there so you can conveniently adjust the stem, bar, seatpost and even bottle cage bolts. (*scott-sports.com*)

Argon 18 Sum $6,400

The Argon 18 Sum is a performance road bike with a well-chosen spec. Available in six sizes from XXS to XL, the frame's carbon layup is engineered to be both lightweight and aerodynamic. The build on this model includes Shimano's reliable 105 Di2 system, as well as Scope S4.A wheels paired with 28-mm Vittoria Corsa tires and Shimano 105 hydraulic disc brakes. FSA cockpit components, including the Energy SCR Compact handlebar and SMR-II stem, complete the build. While paint won't make you fast, Argon's stunning colour options on the Sum are worth noting. You can get this model in podium grey gloss, race day red gloss or in gorgeous British racing green. (*argon18.com*)—*Jake Williams*

SCOPE
SCOTT
ARGON 18

Cervélo Caledonia-5 $16,500

When you want to ride fast for a very long time, the Cervélo Caledonia-5 is the answer. For the latest iteration of the all-road machine, Cervélo added down-tube stiffness, as well as an in-frame storage compartment for essential tools. Shimano Dura-Ace Di2 electronic shifting provides flawless performance, while Dura-Ace disc brakes offer confident speed modulation. The wheels are Reserve 42/49 by Cervélo. The front hoop has a depth of 42 mm, while the rear is 49 mm—an arrangement that improves aerodynamics. While the Caledonia comes with 30-mm-wide Vittoria Corsa Pro Control tires, there's enough clearance for up to 36-mm of rubber. You also get fender mounts, a 4iiii dual-sided power meter and Cervélo's full range of carbon cockpit bits. Available in sizes from 48 to 61 cm, this bike is fast, UCI-approved and comes with a lifetime warranty. (*cervelo.com*)

3T Strada Italia $15,099

As the name suggests, the 3T Strada Italia is a made-in-Italy performance road bike designed for speed and comfort. Its carbon-fibre frame is built with 3T's filament-winding process and resin transfer moulding for strength and stiffness. Available in five sizes from 48 to 58 cm, the bike uses a geometry that allows more people to run fewer spacers beneath the stem, which, like the handlebar, is designed by 3T. Adding to the Strada Italia's aero-friendly design are the Zipp 303 Firecrest wheels with durable 32-mm-wide Continental GP 5000 tires. The whole frame and fork are optimized for treads 30- to 35-mm wide. The 2 x 12 Shimano Ultegra Di2 drivetrain provides precise gear changes, while the Ultegra crankset comes with a built-in power meter for measuring just how much power you're laying down on the road. (*3t.bike*)

Pinarello X7 $13,500

The carbon-fibre frame of Pinarello X7 features X Stays that meet at the seat tube and lessen road vibrations sent through the frame. Pinarello's Endurance+ geometry provides a more relaxed position, and nine sizes ensure a range of fit options. The drivetrain is Shimano's Ultegra Di2. The hydraulic disc brakes have plenty of stopping power for the X7's Ultrafast 40 wheels by the company's in-house component brand Most. The frame and fork offer clearance for 35-mm-wide treads, which keep you rolling well on all kinds of tarmac and even light gravel. The one-piece Most Talon Ultra Light handlebar and stem, and carbon seatpost enhance aerodynamics. When you have a good budget and even bigger ambition, the Pinarello X7 is a great option that will take you wherever you want to go, quickly. (*unoimports.com*)—*Dan Dakin*

Argon 18 Equation $3,200

The Argon 18 Equation is an entry-level carbon road bike that delivers a high-quality endurance ride at a good price. The frame is built using Argon 18's Topological Compliance System technology to reduce road vibrations and maximize pedalling efficiency so that none of your watts go to waste. The size-specific endurance geometry keeps you comfortable for long hours in the saddle. Integrated cabling gives the bike the sleek look of higher-end machines. Those cables and hoses connect Tiagra-level components by Shimano, a groupset that does an excellent job of balancing value and performance. (*argon18.com*)

Specialized Allez Sport $2,200

The Specialized Allez Sport is a versatile aluminum road bike capable of taking on just about anything: your daily commute, fast group rides and even races. The bike has fender mounts and the means to attach a rack. The frame and fork fit 35-mm-wide tires, which increase comfort and control. The Shimano Tiagra levers and derailleurs move the KMC chain across a 10-speed, 11–32 tooth Sunrace cassette and 50/34-tooth Praxis Alba crankset, so you'll be able to spin up steep hills. The Allez Sport borrows the endurance geometry of Specialized's all-road Roubaix to keep you comfortable on long rides. (*specialized.com*)

SPECIALIZED

Opus Fortitude $2,100

Opus launched the new Fortitude this past winter. It's an all-round road bike built on an aluminum frame and carbon fork. Many of its parts are from Shimano's Tiagra group, including levers, derailleurs and the crankset. You get a solid range of gears: 50/34-tooth chainrings working with an 11–34 tooth cassette. The chainstays are fairly short—but not race bike short—which help to keep the handling responsive. The overall geometry puts you in a comfortable and efficient position, so you'll find it easier to head out on longer and longer distances. The clearance for tires as wide as 35 mm (comes with 32-mm Kenda 4Titude treads) means you can take on some rougher surfaces, too. (*opusbike.com*)—*Hannah Marais*

PROJECTONE
TREK
AEOLUS PRO

Trek Checkmate SLR 7 $11,400

Released this past summer, the Checkmate takes elements from the old Checkpoint and the new Madone to create Trek's new lightweight, aero race bike for gravel. For rider comfort, the company adds its IsoSpeed technology to mellow the effects of rough surfaces. The bike's geometry is aggressive, optimized for racing. Borrowing the new RSL one-piece bar and stem from the Madone, the Checkmate is snappy at the front end. Gravel races often require you to carry tools, spares and extra fuel. The Checkmate has mounts for running frame bags, including a top-tube bag and front triangle bag that sit neatly hidden away from the wind. A 12-speed SRAM Force AXS group keeps the bike shifting and braking smoothly, while Bontrager Aeolus Pro 3V wheels offer quick engagement and fast acceleration. (*trekbikes.com*)

Cervélo Áspero $5,700

When the Cervélo Áspero launched in 2019, it was among the first gravel race bikes. The latest version features tube shapes that have been streamlined. The internal cable routing at the headset has the bike looking better than ever. It's also part of the reason the company says the Áspero is 3 W faster than its predecessor. Some more compliance in the front and rear of the bike help with comfort. If you run 45-mm-wide tires, you'll have 6 mm of clearance between the chainstays to keep you rolling at those messy early-season races. With an easily serviced threaded bottom bracket and universal derailleur hanger, your mechanic might forgive you for bringing in a muddy bike. The GRX 820 build of the bike comes with the latest 12-speed version of the groupset and a capable, but affordable, aluminum Fulcrum Rapid Red 300 wheelset. (*cervelo.com*)

Felt Breed Advanced $5,699

The Felt Breed is a purpose-built gravel race bike with a few tricks up its sleeve, keeping with trends in the modern racing scene. One of the standout features is the large tire clearance: space for 50-mm-wide treads. With the pro gravel peloton seemingly going wider each year, this feature just about future-proofs the frame. The seat tube has Felt's Taperloc vibration-damping sleeve, which can accept a dropper post. The frame was also designed with gravel suspension forks in mind, allowing you to add even more cushion and capability to your bike. The 12-speed Shimano GRX 820 is a dependable and quick mechanical groupset. A modernized Reynolds G700 carbon wheelset keeps the bike feeling snappy. The 38-mm Vittoria Terreno Dry tires are a nice touch as the stock rubber. (*feltbicycles.com*)—*James Bunga*

Cannondale Topstone Carbon LTD Di2 $9,855

For bikepacking or racing for a local FKT, the new Cannondale Topstone Carbon LTD Di2 is a lightweight gravel bike capable of handling all of your adventures. It weighs in at 8.9 kg in size 56. The frame is equipped with Cannondale's KingPin gravel rear-suspension system to help you tackle rougher terrain with its 30 mm of travel. For even more squish, there's a Lefty model of Topstone featuring 40 mm of travel from Cannondale's single-sided suspension fork. There's storage in the down tube, where you can stash a mutli-tool and a mini-pump. While the Topstone Carbon comes with 45-mm tires, it has the clearance for 56-mm-wide tires up front and 52 mm in the rear. (*cannondale.com*)

YT Szepter Core 3 $4,599

With the YT Szepter Core 3's RockShox Judy suspension fork and MTB-inspired geometry, it is a gravel bike made to explore. It has a fairly slack 69.4-degree head-tube angle that makes for excellent handling on descents. The longer reach thanks to the top-tube length boosts stability. The Szepter Core 3 is outfitted with a SRAM Rival XPLR eTap AXS drivetrain; it's wireless so you won't have cables to interfere with a handlebar bag. (As for the hydraulic brake hoses, they'll bend out of the way.) The carbon frame has space for two large water bottles, as well as a frame bag. It comes with integrated fenders to keep off the mud during rainy adventures. (*yt-industries.com*)

Trek Checkpoint SL 5 Gen 3 $4,300

The Trek Checkpoint SL 5 Gen 3 is built around a carbon-fibre frame with Trek's IsoSpeed decoupler to lessen the effects of gravel roads. It has plenty of mounting points to equip the bike with bags, racks and fenders. For extra storage, pop open the door on the down tube. You can add a dropper post and a 40-mm suspension fork (except in size XS) if you prefer exploring well off of the beaten path. The Checkpoint SL 5 has clearance for up to 50 mm tires. The frame rolls on the company's house-brand hoops—Bontrager Paradigm SL—made with durable aluminum rims. (*trekbikes.com*)—*HM*

BOTTECCHIA

2025
BUYER'S
GUIDE

GEAR

GRAVEL PRICE POINT

Bottecchia Gravel Monster $3,000

The Italian brand Bottecchia is so old. How old is it? It's so old that when it started producing road bikes in the late 1920s, gravel roads were a common feature of Grand Tours. Now, in a way, what's old is new. Bottecchia's Gravel Monster is made from an aluminum frame (definitely not 1920s tech) to explore today's back roads. It has the geometry, and the mounts for bags and cages, to take you on long, rambling bikepacking adventures. Clearance for 50-mm-wide tires means you can have plenty of squish and cush to keep things smooth on rough surfaces. The spec for this Monster includes Shimano GRX 400 derailleurs and disc brakes. The 10-speed, 11–34 tooth GRX cassette combined with the 46/30-tooth FSA Omega MegaExo crankset will have you taking on any old beast of a hill. (*logicasport.com*)

Scott Speedster Gravel 40 $2,200

The alloy Speedster Gravel sports the endurance geometry of the road-focused Speedster by Scott, but with longer chainstays to accommodate the 45c Schwalbe G-One Bite Performance tire that the 40 model comes with. That rubber and the position the bike puts you in will make exploring smooth and rough roads easier on your wrists, neck and lower back, while you can still put power to the pedals efficiently. Shimano's Tiagra components handle shifting. They include a 50/34-tooth set of chainrings and 11–34 cassette: a good range of gears that will let you cruise on the flats and tackle the inclines. The brake calipers are mechanical, which will scrub your speed well, but not with the same level of performance as a hydraulic set. The bike can take fenders so it's not afraid of a little muck, just like you, right? (*scott-sports.com*)

Devinci Hatchet Vista $2,199

The Hatchet Vista is one of three new gravel bikes that Devinci launched this past February. It has an aluminum frame, carbon fork and spec chosen to get you exploring. The components are Shimano's new dropbar parts within the company's Cues system. You get an excellent range of gears with the 10-speed, 11–48 tooth cassette matched with the 40-tooth chainring. The hydraulic disc brakes have top stopping power. This model comes with 42c WTB Resolute tires, but you can swap them out for 45-mm-wide treads. Mounts abound so you can put on a bunch of bottle cages, side cages on the fork, and a rack and fenders. It's a truly versatile machine at a good price. (*devinci.com*)—*Matthew Pioro*

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Giant Defy Advanced E+ Elite 0 $14,999

The Defy Advanced E+ Elite 0 is a refined all-road frame with an equally dialed pedal-assist system. Giant developed its own hub-drive unit that uses a thru axle with magnetic coupler to get power from the 400-Wh battery to the motor. It's an elegant design that, unlike with many other hub-drive systems, lets you remove the rear wheel easily to repair a flat. The motor's behaviour is top-notch: smooth, not surge-y at the start, and consistent when you are hovering around the 32 km/h mark, the speed at which the assist stops. It puts out a maximum torque of 30 Nm, which Giant says is the equivalent of 75 Nm with a mid-drive motor. If you want to tweak the unit's settings you can through the RideControl app. The frame's geometry puts you in a comfortable position, while also giving you responsive handling. The top-of-the-line SRAM Red groupset takes care of shifting and braking. (*giant-bicycles.com*)

Specialized Turbo Creo 2 Comp $9,500

You can take on just about any gravel surface with the Turbo Creo 2 Comp. It has clearance for tires as wide as 2.2". (That's 56-mm wide if you speak 700c.) Specialized's Turbo SL 1.2 system provides the pedal assistance. A 320-Wh battery sends power to the 50-Nm motor. Just below the stem of the bike is the Future Shock 3.0, which allows for 20 mm of travel just above the head tube. With this version of the Future Shock, you can adjust the compression on the fly. SRAM Apex eTap AXS levers work with an X1 Eagle AXS derailleur and NX Eagle cassette. A TranzX dropper with 50 mm of travel will get the saddle out of the way when you have a challenging route to rip. (*specialized.com*)

Ceepo Ion $7,995

The Ion is an all-road frame that will let you pedal fast while keeping you in a position that's easy to hold for kilometre after kilometre. Helping you cover those distances is a Maxon BikeDrive Air system. Its 40-Nm motor sits at the bottom bracket, working with the bike's centre of gravity. The Maxon doesn't add much mass to the bike as the drive unit and 250-Wh battery only weigh about 3.5 kg. The electronics work in conjunction with a mechanical Shimano 105 groupset. While the bike ships with 30c tires, the frame and fork have space for 40-mm-wide treads, so you and the Ion can take on some gravel with ease. (*damourbicycle.com*)—*MP*

Trek Fetch+ 4 $8,500

The Trek Fetch+ 4 is an e-cargo box bike for those who want a two-wheel car replacement. The front box comes with two child seats and can carry as many as four kids or your whole grocery run (as much as 80 kg worth). There's also space for a child seat on the rear rack. The Bosch Performance Line Cargo motor is powerful enough (85 Nm) to get you and all of your passengers where you need to go with ease. With a massive wheelbase, 201.8 cm, the Fetch's handling takes a bit of getting used to, but its 1.3 steering ratio (that is, the front wheel moves to a greater degree than the handlebars) can get it around some pretty tight corners. The bike comes equipped with lights, fenders, a dropper post—which makes sharing the bike among riders a breeze—and a kickstand to keep everything stable when you're loading or unloading. (*trekbikes.com*)

Specialized Turbo Vado SL 2 4.0 Step-Through $6,000

The Specialized Turbo Vado SL 2 4.0, which launched in March, is a stylish and lightweight ebike, perfect for city commuting, running errands or just zipping around. The alloy machine comes equipped with fenders, a rear rack, a kickstand and integrated lights, plus is compatible with a range of accessories. The drivetrain is largely parts from Shimano's Cues lineup. A set of Tektro HD-R285 hydraulic brakes take care of stopping the bike. Weighing in at about 20 kg, the Vado is on the lighter end of bikes in its class. Yet, it has serious power: 50 Nm of peak torque and 520-Wh battery give you up to five hours of ride time, or roughly a week's worth of commuting. (*specialized.com*)

Devinci E-Milano HD $2,499

For commuting or urban riding, the Devinci E-Milano HD comes fully equipped with all the accessories you need to make your ride smooth and hassle-free. To combat potholes on city roads, the aluminum frame is outfitted with a Suntour suspension fork with 75 mm of travel. A Shimano Altus derailleur works with an eight-speed, 11–40 tooth Sunrace cassette. The bike is spec'd with fenders, lights, a kickstand and a rear rack for carrying all of your essentials. The 60-Nm SR Suntour rear hub-drive motor and 504-Wh battery give you a range of up to 95 km to get you wherever you need to go. (*devinci.com*)—*HM*

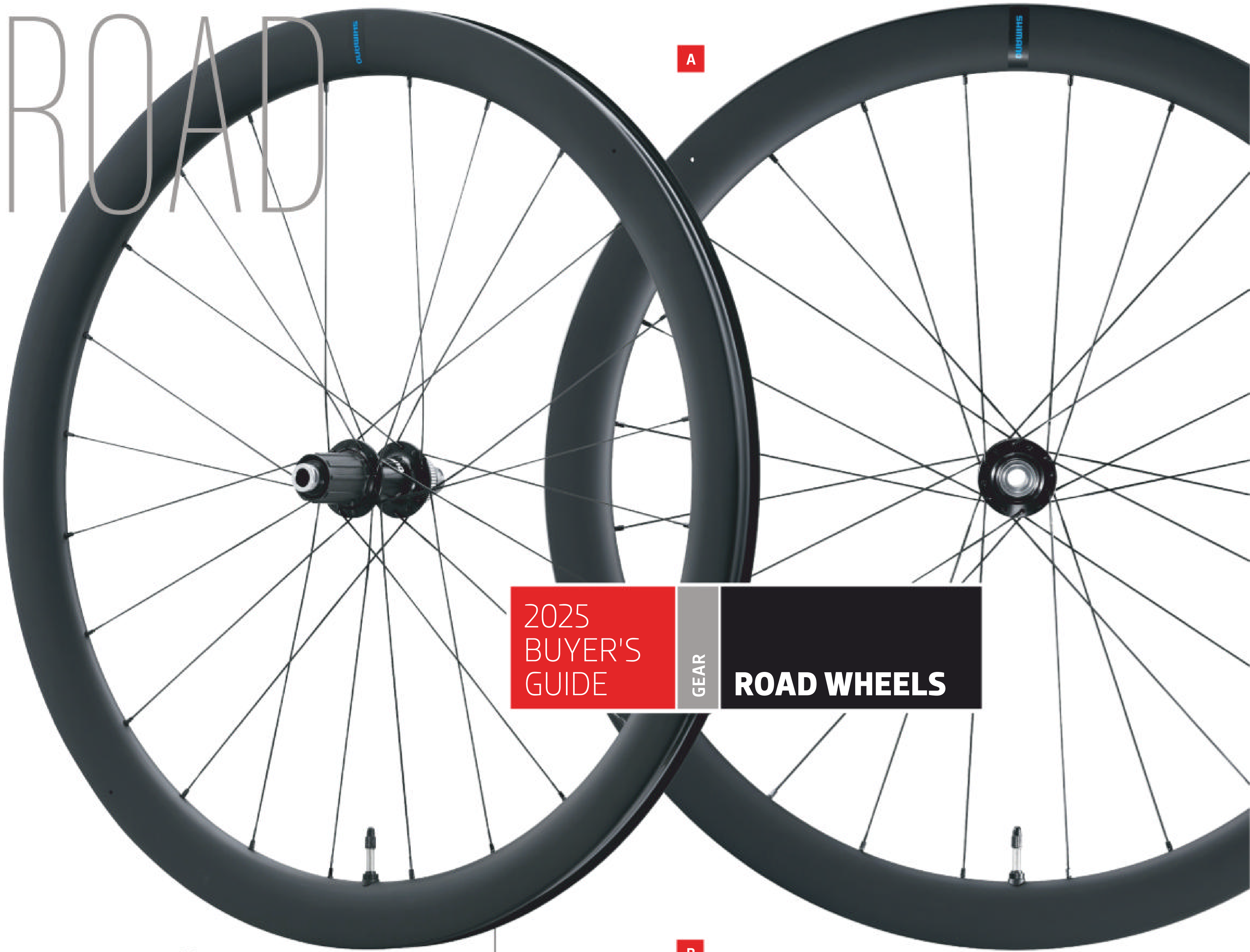
ROAD

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

GEAR

ROAD WHEELS

A



B

Vision
Vision
45 SC
45 SC

Shimano **105** $1,500 A

Shimano's 105-level C46 tubeless wheelset brings carbon performance to a more accessible price point. Drawing from Shimano's development of its top-tier Dura-Ace and Ultegra wheels, the C46 offers a balanced approach for all-around road riding. The 46-mm-deep full carbon rim provides an aero advantage while the 21-mm internal rim width is optimized for tires 25- to 32-mm wide. The tubeless-ready C46 wheels are compatible with 11- and 12-speed drivetrains and come with Center Lock disc mounts and 12-mm thru-axle hubs. (*shimano.com*)

Vision **SC 45 TL** $2,108 B

Debuting in 2024, the Vision SC 45 is the latest evolution of the popular wheelset with rim technology derived from the higher-end Metron range. With 45-mm deep, full-carbon rims, the SC 45 are tubeless-ready and compatible with clincher tires. The hubs use direct pull spokes and Center Lock rotor mounts. Sealed cartridge bearings—two in the front hub, four in the back—ensure smooth rotation. In the wind, Vision has found the SC 45 are more stable in crosswinds compared with the old SC 40. Also, at some yaw angles, the SC 45 are 8 per cent faster than the SC 40. Each wheelset is built by hand. The pair weighs in at 1,590 g. (*fsaproshop.com*)

Campagnolo **Shamal** $2,840 C

The newly redesigned Campagnolo Shamal wheelset features a dual-depth profile on both its front and rear rims. Where the spokes meet the rim, the depth is about 45 mm and about 40 mm elsewhere. This construction improves aerodynamics and handling, particularly in crosswinds. The rims are optimized for wider tires, 28 mm on the low end, and offer a comfortable ride over long distances. Weighing 1,480 g per pair, they've been lightened compared with previous models. The aluminum hubs use a cup-and-cone system for easy bearing maintenance. Hand-assembled in Europe, the Shamals offer a blend of performance, versatility and value, making them a great option. (*campagnolo.com*)

C

AERO 111
DT SWISS

D

DT Swiss **ARC 1100** $4,200 D

The DT Swiss ARC 1100 Dicut DB wheelset represents the pinnacle of aero wheel technology. Available in 38-mm, 50-mm (pictured), 62-mm and 80-mm rim depths, the aero profiles minimize drag, even in crosswinds. The 50-mm hoops are best on undulating, twisty routes. DT Swiss aero spokes and the 180 Dicut hub with Sinc ceramic bearings complete the package. DT Swiss has worked with Swiss Side and Continental Tires to create the Aero 111 tire for the front wheel for maximum aerodynamics. Weighing from just 1,297 g per set, these wheels offer a top-of-the-line option for the most discerning road riders. (*dtswiss.com*)—*DD*

A

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

GEAR

GRAVEL WHEELS

FSA **SL-K i25** $2,190 A

The FSA SL-K i25 is a great, no-nonsense gravel wheelset. They are hand-built with carbon rims matched with FSA's CNC'd hubs. The 25-mm internal rim width ensures your gravel tires have plenty of support. The rim depth is 30 mm. At 1,500 g for the 700c pair, it's not the lightest wheelset out there, but also not the heaviest. All in all, the SL-K i25 is a good-quality set that will put up with whatever you throw at them on gravel roads and even trails. (*fsaproshop.com*)

Hunt **40 Limitless Gravel Aero** $3,382 B

The Hunt 40 Limitless is an out-and-out aero race wheelset. It has 40-mm deep rims optimized for aerodynamics around tires ranging in width from 40 to 45 mm. (You can still run tires as skinny as 35 mm and as wide as 60 mm.) With the pair weighing in at 1,328 g, you get a good balance of weight savings along with the aerodynamic gains. Hunt's in-house H_Rachet hubs have quick, 7.5-degree engagement, and come with either stainless-steel or CeramicSpeed bearings. The latter will boost the price to $4,480. With optimized front and rear rim profiles developed in the wind tunnel, these wheels won't hold you back while you fight to stay in the front group at your local gravel race. (*huntbikewheels.cc*)

HUNT
LIMITLESS

B

Fulcrum **Sharq** $3,699 C

Designed for performance both on- and off-road, the Fulcrum Sharq wheels, which debuted June 2024, are a great do-it-all set. A 25-mm inner rim width will provide an aerodynamic shape to road tires as narrow as 30 mm, while offering plenty of support to larger gravel tires. The wheels are tubeless-ready as the rim beds are solid, so there's no need to tape over spoke holes. For hookless-tentative riders, these rims actually sport mini hooks to provide some extra security with a tubeless setup or allow for clinchers. The wave design of the rims means their depth ranges from 42 mm to 47 mm. The wave adds to the crosswind stability of the wheels. Ceramic bearings in the hubs keep things rolling smoothly. A total weight of 1,440 g means you're sure to crush your favourite hill climbs. (*fulcrumwheels.com*)

C
FULCRUM
SHARQ
FULCRUM
SHARQ

Allroad
Allroad
MAVIC
MAVIC
D

Mavic **Allroad SL Carbon** $2,600 D

The Mavic Allroad SL Carbon is the legendary French brand's fast and comfortable gravel wheelset offering. At 25-mm wide on the internal rim width, the wheels provide support for hookless tires 30- to 64-mm wide, letting you make the final call on your tire choice. The 42-mm deep rims are on the deeper side, giving you some additional aerodynamic advantage compared with shallower rims. The set weighs 1,550 g. Living up to Mavic's name, these hand-built wheels provide excellent comfort and durability, while being quick to respond under power. (*mavic.com*)—*JB*

ROAD

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

GEAR

ROAD TIRES

Continental
AERO
111
P ZERO
TM RACE
TLR RS
MICHELIN
POWER PROTECTION

Continental **Aero 111** $170

For aerodynamic performance, puncture protection and good grip, the Continental Aero 111 checks all the boxes. The Aero 111 with cavities called vortex generators is the front tire designed to work in conjunction with the features of DT Swiss's ARC 1100 wheel. The tire uses Continental's Black Chili compound for minimal rolling resistance and good grip on the roads, in all kinds of weather. The Vectran Breaker technology adds puncture protection so you can focus on the ride. The tire weighs 280 g in the size 29c width, pictured here, and is compatible with both hooked and hookless systems. The tires are also available in a size 26c. (*ogc.ca*)

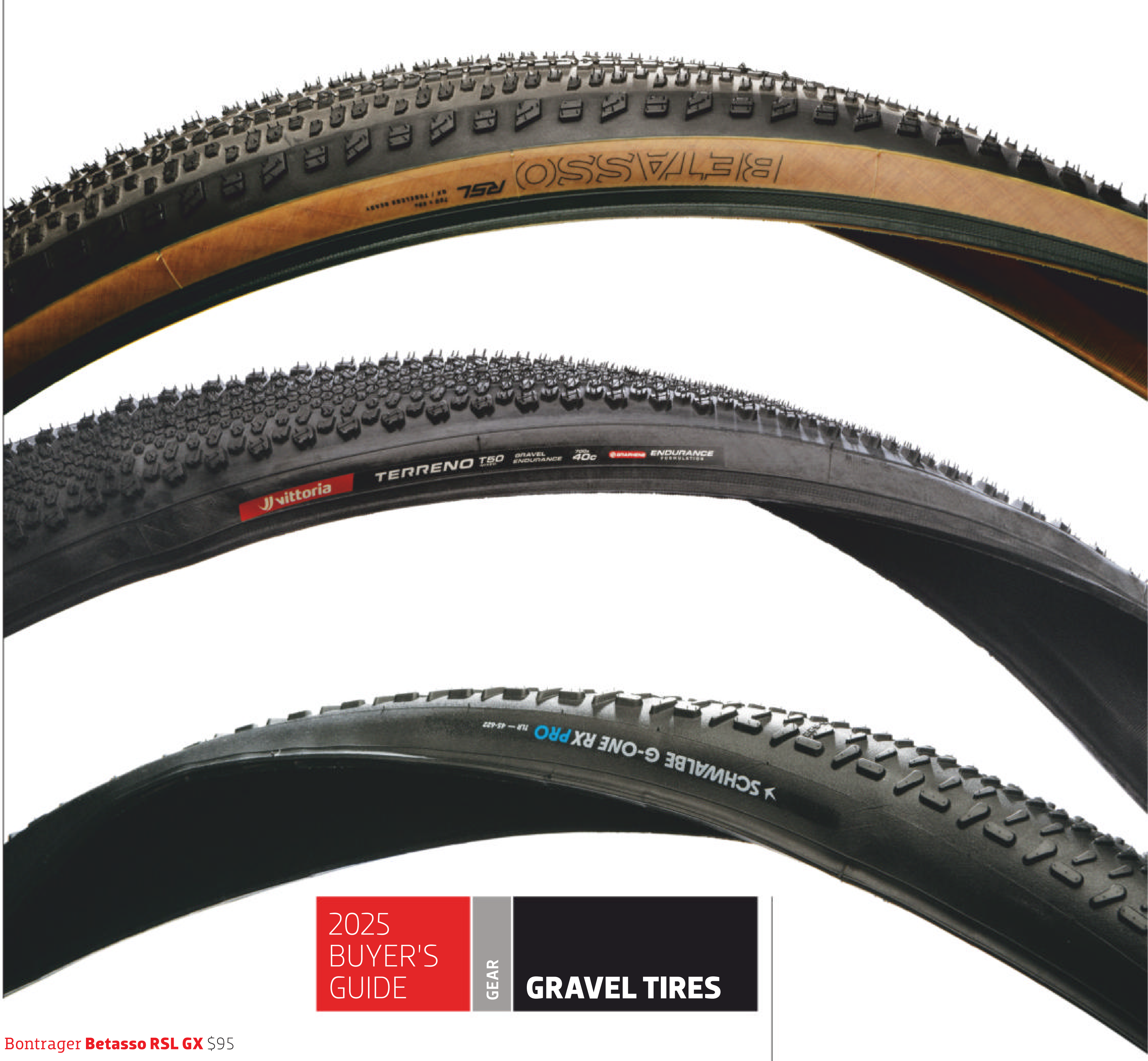
Pirelli **P Zero Race TLR RS** $137

The Pirelli P Zero Race TLR RS is a race-ready tire that is made for speed without compromising on handling or grip. It's made with Pirelli's SmartEvo compound, a mix of three polymers that provide grip on the roads in dry and wet conditions. The Zero Race also uses the lighter-weight iteration of Pirelli's SpeedCore that improves the tire's tubeless performance. The tread weighs in at 290 g in the 28c, pictured. (*pirelli.com*)

Michelin **Power Protection TLR Competition Line** $115

The Michelin Power Protection TLR Competition Line tire uses the company's Magi-X compound, which gives you excellent grip in wet conditions, while the tread pattern is designed for durability and to keep your bike stable over rough roads. To help prevent punctures and pinch flats, the tire has a protective layer that runs from bead to bead, as well as a strip that runs beneath the centre of the tread. The Power Protection TLR Competition Line tire is tubeless-ready and compatible with hooked and hookless rims. It weighs 315 g in the 28c width and is also available in widths 30c, 32c and 35c. (*michelin.ca*)—*HM*

Photos: Hiep Vu



2025
BUYER'S
GUIDE

GEAR

GRAVEL TIRES

GRAVEL

Bontrager **Betasso RSL GX** $95

Available in 42c, 45c and the 50c shown here, the Betasso is like a mini mountain bike tire for your gravel rig. It has a fairly aggressive tread. A harder rubber lies along the centre to help the tire roll well, while the medium-density compound on the side knobs boosts grip. Two types of puncture protection are beneath the tread so you can spend more time actually riding on your next bikepacking adventure. (*trekbikes.com*)

Vittoria **Terreno T50** $110

The 40c Vittoria Terreno T50 is best on mixed, variable terrain. The minimal, compact tread down the middle keeps the tire fast on hardpack or asphalt and larger side knobs provide extra cornering grip in loose conditions. Much like Vittoria's road tires, the Terreno T50 uses graphene in its compound to improve rolling resistance and even to keep punctures at bay. This technology combined with the versatile tread pattern makes the Terreno T50 a great all-around choice for everyday gravel riding. (*ogc.ca*)

Schwalbe **G-One RX Pro** $135

The G-One RX Pro is a fast gravel tire for tackling the roughest conditions. With an aggressive tread, it can handle loose, rocky and muddy conditions, while maintaining as much speed as possible. Prominent centre knobs help clear mud and dig into loose ground. Side lugs provide even more grip when pushing the tire to its limits. It's available in three widths: 40c, 45c (pictured) and 50c. The latest Addix Race compound makes this tire perfect for gravel competitions. (*schwalbetires.com*)—*JB*

Photos: Hiep Vu

MAXXIS
SCOTT
SCOTT
MAXXIS

TREK

Scott Spark RC World Cup $12,000

What more could you want from a dream XC whip than the bike trusted by Nino Schurter (and, now, Vancouver Island's Emilly Johnston)? Every time Scott updates the Spark, it pushes further into the future of XC construction. With the Spark RC World Cup, streamlined frame design shakes hands with wirelessly controlled shifting from SRAM's X0 Eagle AXS Transmission system and electronic Flight Attendant suspension from RockShox (120 mm front and rear) to deliver one of the most advanced race bikes available to consumers. The Silverton 1.0 wheels, as well as the dropper post, handlebar, seatpost, saddle and headset are by Scott's house-brand, Syncros. (*scott-sports.com*)

Trek Top Fuel 9.9 $11,000

Trek's Top Fuel continues to evolve into an ever-more impressive light trail bike. While the Top Fuel's looks may be unassuming, it packs a staggering level of performance into its carbon-fibre frame. Wireless shifting from SRAM's X0 group meets efficient Ultimate-level suspension from RockShox (120-mm rear, 130-mm front) for a bike that thrives as much on punchy climbs and fast, flowing descents as it does ripping along winding ribbons of singletrack. The four-way Mino Link lets you adjust the bike's geometry, changing the angle of the head tube and the position of the bottom bracket, as well as dial in the suspension for the terrain you ride. With a stash compartment in the down tube for tools (or snacks), you can pack as light as you like for quick escapes into the woods. (*trekbikes.com*)

Pivot Trailcat SL Team $15,835

If Pivot's Shadowcat aimed to show how much fun 27.5" wheels still can be, the Trailcat is intent on proving the same is possible with 29" wheels. The SL version pairs an efficient 120 mm of DW-link rear travel with a 140-mm fork. Adding to that system is Fox's Neo Live Valve, an electronically controlled shock that, working with the Trailcat's DW-link suspension, shows that fun can be fast and efficient, too. The Transfer Neo, Fox's wireless dropper, lets you adjust the Phoenix ETB Volt Team saddle quickly. With a full XTR drivetrain and brakes and Renyolds light-weight carbon-fibre wheels, Trailcat SL Team XTR Neo takes trail bikes to the next level. (*pivotcycles.com*)—*Terry McKall*

MAXXIS
PIVOT
MAXXIS
MINION DHR II
DISSECTOR
XTR
34

XYNOTAL
KRYPTOTAL
Continental
Continental

Revel Rascal US$5,999

The Rascal exemplifies what a small, boutique company like Colorado's Revel Bikes can do with a focused effort. The brand's bikes elevate the iconic Canfield Balance Formula (CBF) suspension design with elegant carbon-fibre frames. With the Rascal, that combo produces a lightweight trail bike that is almost as efficient climbing as it is surprisingly capable on the way back down. CBF gives the Rascal—in this case, one with a Shimano XT drivetrain and brakes—support when you want it and endless-feeling traction from the 130 mm of rear travel when you need it. There are no gimmicks or extra bits to fiddle with on the frame—just a super-clean design that finds fun on every section of trail. (*revelbikes.com*)

Atherton
Continental
Continental
KRYPTOTAL
KRYPTOTAL

Atherton S.150.3 £4,499

Atherton's S line of bikes brings the brand's high-end carbon/3D-printed titanium design to a more reasonable price point by moving to aluminum alloy frames, opening up the Atherton brand to more riders. Alloy lug-and-tube construction, a 12-size range (with fit guide online) and the DW4 suspension design make sure the S.150.3 stays true to the brand. A suite of reliable parts, from 12-speed mechanical SRAM GX/NX drivetrain, Marzocchi Bomber shock (150 mm) and Z1 fork (160 mm), Hayes Dominion A4 brakes and MX alloy wheels can handle riding like an Atherton, which is usually flat-out, all the time. (*athertonbikes.com*)

Devinci Troy ST $6,999

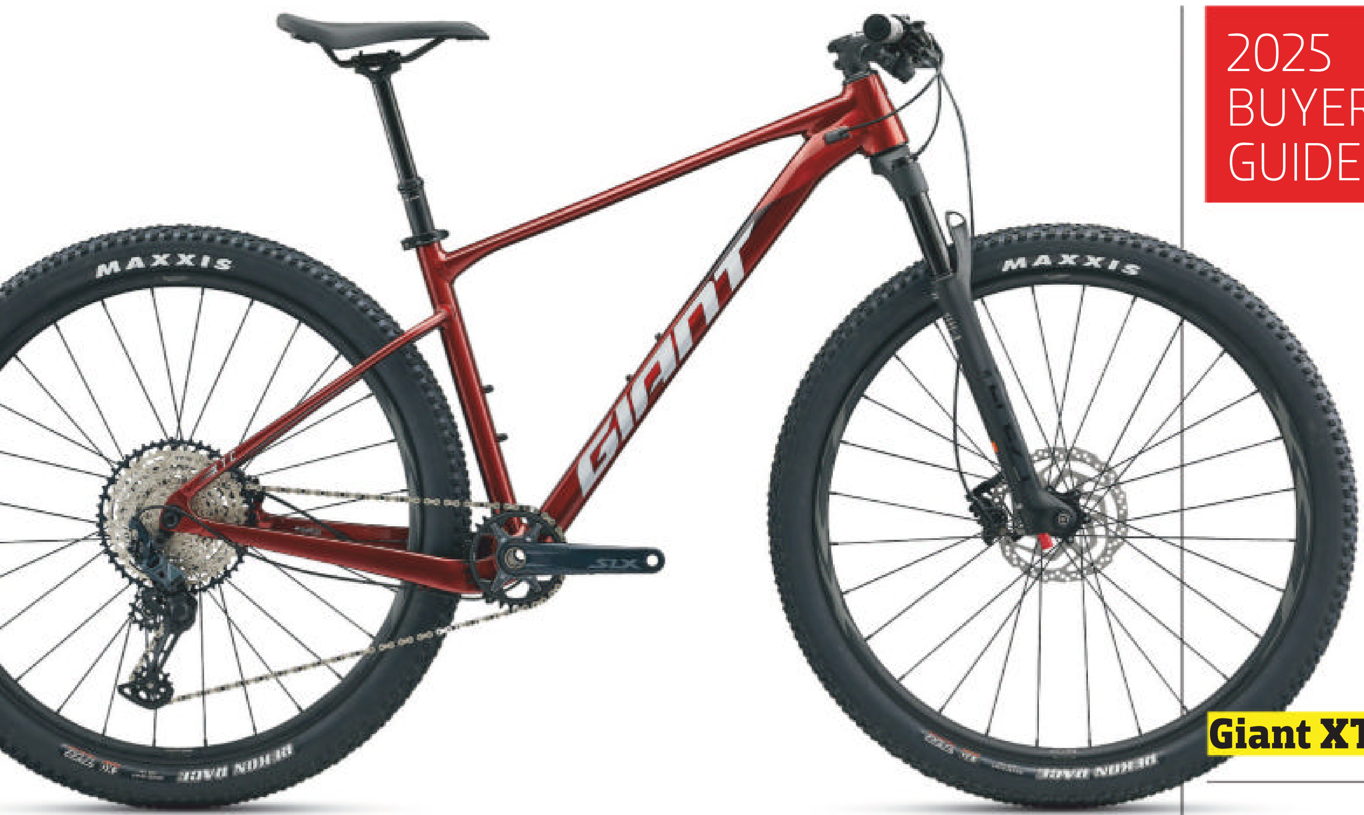
Devinci is one of the few remaining brands still actually making its frames in Canada. Welded in Chicoutimi, Que., this ST is a more nimble version of the long-running Troy. With a "shed" frame storage compartment, a 140-mm RockShox Pike Ultimate fork and 130-mm Deluxe Ultimate shock working with Divinci's split-pivot suspension design, SRAM GX AXS wireless shifting and Race Face wheels, this is a steal for just less than seven grand. If all that isn't enough, Devinci is so confident in the Troy ST that the frame is backed by a lifetime warranty. (*devinci.com*)

Specialized Epic 8 Comp $6,500

With the new Epic 8, Specialized brings World Cup cross country performance together with everyday practicality. The frame uses the brand's Fact 11m carbon fibre, including a SWAT 4.0 down-tube storage compartment, together with 120 mm of RockShox SID suspension front and rear travel, both controlled by a TwistLoc remote. Fast enough to race, but with storage for everyday XC adventures. The frame and suspension is backed up by a no-nonsense build of mechanical SRAM GX Eagle drivetrain, four-piston Level Bronze Stealth brakes, X-Fusion Manic dropper post and Specialized's own alloy rims and tires. (*specialized.com*)

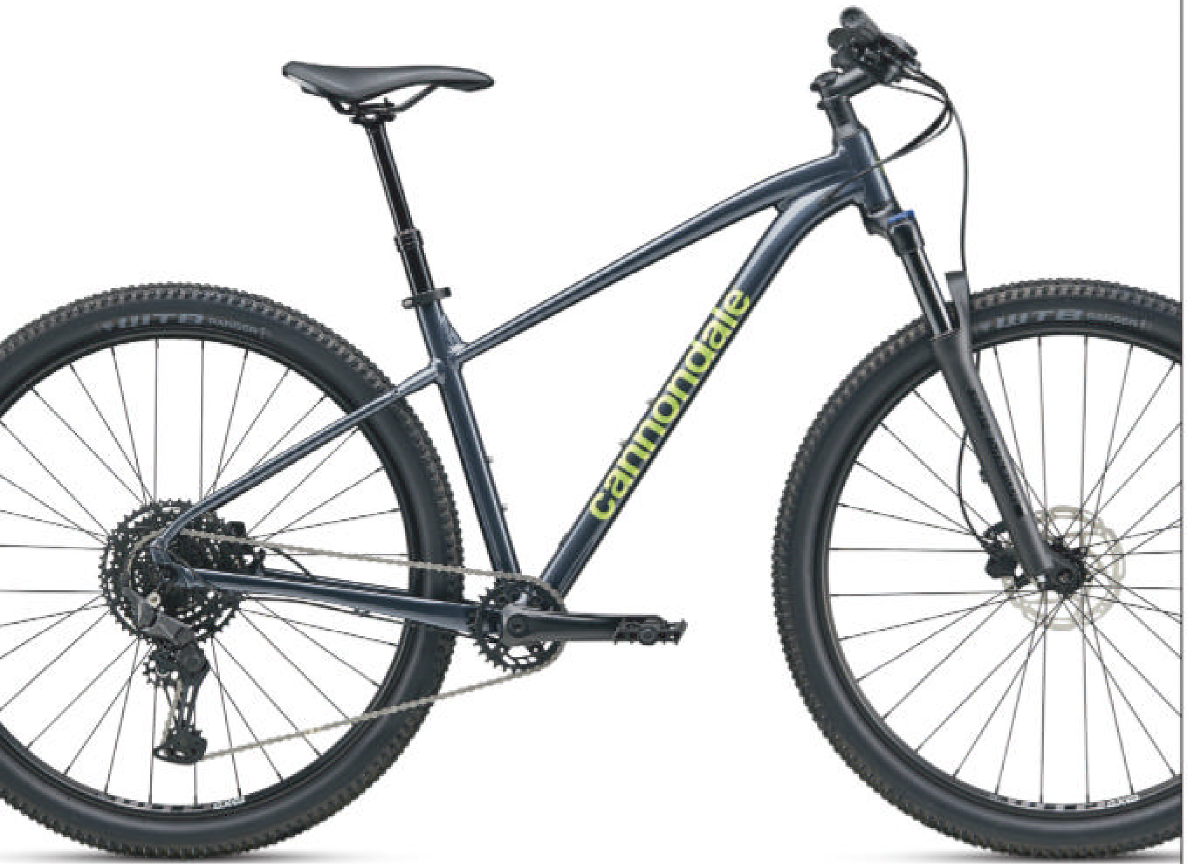
YT Izzo Core 3 $6,299

Izzo brings YT's gravity heritage and focus on fun-factor to the world of short-travel bikes. With the German brand's highest-end Ultra-Modulus carbon-fibre frame and a bougie Öhlins suspension package, the Izzo Core 3 is ready to rally with the best. To balance performance with price, there's no messing around with electronics. The Shimano XT/SLX drivetrain and brakes, as well as DT Swiss XM1700 alloy wheels complete this smartly appointed build. If you like your climbs punchy and your descents just as steep, Izzo could be your trail weapon of choice. (*yt-industries.com*)—*TM*



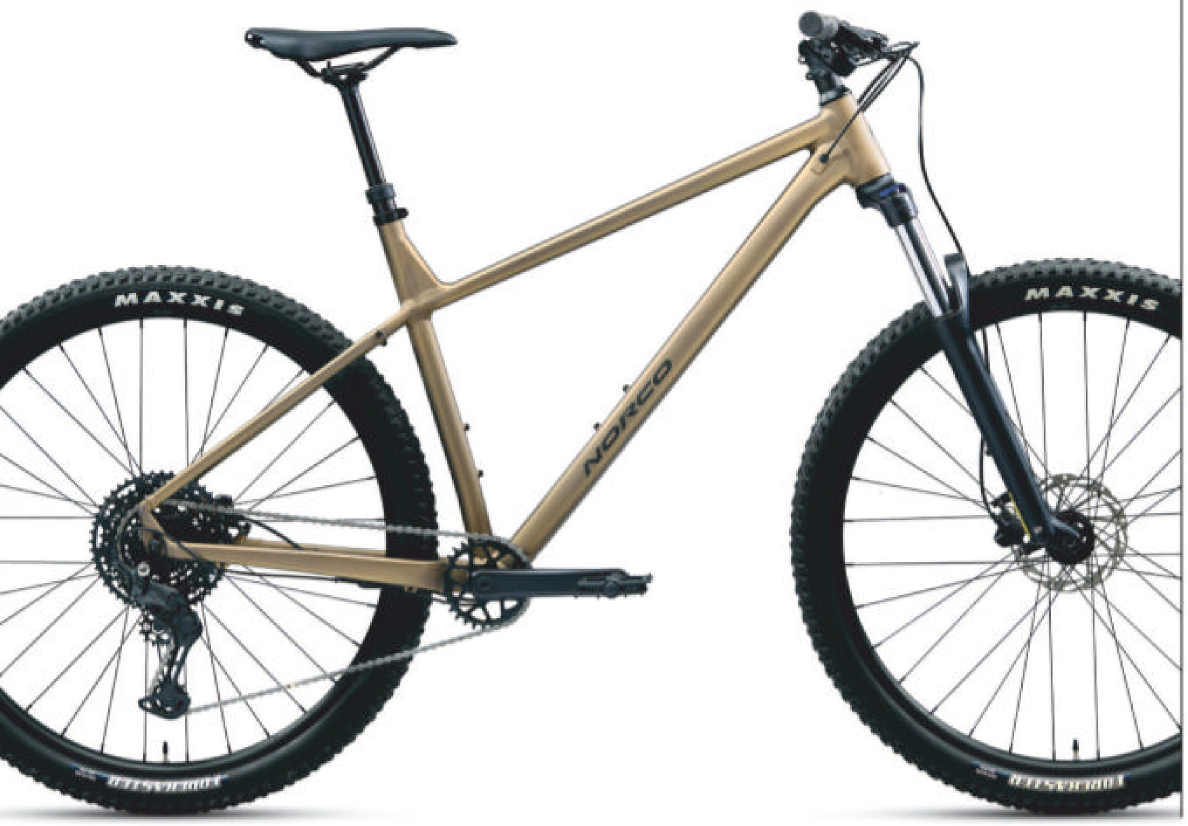
Giant XTC SLR 29 1 $2,199

Giant's alloy XC racer features the company's own air-sprung, 100-mm suspension fork, the Crest 34, complete with magnesium lowers, 110-mm Boost spacing and a remote lock-out. Shimano's 1 x 12 SLX groupset is centred on an 10–51 tooth cassette. Two-piston Shimano MT500 hydraulic disc brakes keep you in control along with some help from Giant's Contact Switch Core dropper post. While other manufacturers have moved back to threaded options, the XTC takes a press-fit bottom bracket. Maximum tire clearance matches the 29 x 2.4 Maxxis Rekon Race tubeless tire spec, wrapped around Giant's 25-mm-wide XCT rims. (*giant-bicycles.com*)



Cannondale Trail 1 $1,285

At the heart of the Trail 1 is a smooth and durable drivetrain. The Cues system by Shimano supplies the 10-speed cassette with cogs ranging from an 11-tooth, to really get you moving, to a 48-tooth, which will help you spin up steep inclines. The hydraulic disc brakes by Tektro have plenty of power to modulate your speed. In sizes XS and S, you get 27.5"-diameter wheels, while M to XL are 29ers. All sizes of the aluminum Trail 1 come with 2.25"-wide WTB Ranger tires. Their air volume, paired with the 100-mm-travel fork (80 mm for XS and S), give you a high level of control when you head out on the trails. This bike could double as a weekend fun machine and daily commuter, especially if you can head through some woods on the way to work and back. (*cannondale.com*)



Norco Storm 120 $1,099

The Norco Storm 120 is a versatile aluminum hardtail paired with an SR Suntour XCM32 LO coil-spring suspension fork with, as you may have guessed, 120 mm of travel along with a 15-mm thru axle. Out back, the frame features quick-release dropouts and rack mounts. To keep everything neat, the cables run internally. Size small rolls on 27.5" wheels, with M to XXL all sporting 29" wheels with 2.25"-wide Maxxis Forekaster tires. Wire beads come stock, so tubeless fans will need to upgrade the rubber. Tektro HD-M275 hydraulic disc brakes do the stopping, and an X-Fusion Manic LC dropper post is a welcome bonus at this price point. (*norco.com*)—*JW*

WE'RE TAKING TERRY'S DREAM ON THE ROAD

45 YEARS

MARATHON OF HOPE

JOIN US FOR AN EPIC CROSS-CANADA JOURNEY 45 YEARS IN THE MAKING

In 1980, Terry Fox set out to achieve something extraordinary: to run across Canada raising money for life-changing cancer research.

This June, Terry's brother Darrell will honour the 45th anniversary of the Marathon of Hope with another epic journey: the National Ride of Hope. Darrell will lead a small but mighty peloton as they cycle 7,000 km from Vancouver to St. John's. It's an ambitious ride with an equally ambitious goal: to raise $1 million to help finish cancer as we know it.

If you're an experienced cyclist, consider joining the National Team on the day we roll through your province.

REGISTER NOW!

HOST YOUR OWN RIDE OF HOPE WITH RIDE YOUR WAY

Use your pedal power to mobilize other riders in your community! Organize a fundraising Ride for your neighbours, colleagues, and cycling group. Or join an existing Ride of Hope event.

GET MORE DETAILS TODAY!

RIDE OF HOPE

TREK
SE5 TEAM ISSUE

Trek Slash+ 9.9 $16,000

If you're keen on Trek's wild high-pivot Slash but are less than thrilled about climbing, Slash+ is just the bike for you. Using TQ's small and near-silent HPR50 motor and a big 580-Wh battery for a lighter take on a burly ebike. There's enough assistance to gain elevation with minimal effort without adding so much weight that it detracts from descending fun. This carbon-fibre 9.9 frame is decked out in top-end components, including the RockShox Zeb Ultimate Deluxe fork and Vivid Ultimate shock (both with 170 mm of travel), SRAM's X0 AXS wireless drivetrain, Reverb AXS post and powerful Maven Silver brakes. (*trekbikes.com*)

MAXXIS
MAXXIS
SCOTT

Scott Voltage eRide 910 $9,800

With a concealed shock, the Voltage eRide 910 has sharp looks. But this Scott is not all about appearances. A bar-mounted remote switches the hidden rear shock between full, 155-mm travel, a 100-mm traction-control mode for technical climbing and traverses and, to get the most out of that quiet TQ-HPR50 motor and 360-Wh battery, a lock-out mode, so you can enjoy the whole ride, not just the descents. A mix of Shimano Deore and XT components, the Fox 36 Rhythm fork and Syncros house-brand parts keep the 910's price more modest than its futuristic looks. (*scott-sports.com*)

YT Decoy SN Core 2 $8,999

The emerging mid-weight eMTB category is forcing brands to pick priorities. With the Decoy SN, YT chooses the mid-power Fazua Ride 60 and a middle-ground 430-Wh battery to save weight over a full-power rig, but builds out this e-enduro bike with real-world durability. RockShox Vivid Select (160 mm) and Zeb Select (170 mm) deliver on the Decoy SN's potential without breaking the bank, while a 27.5"/29" mix of DT Swiss H1900 alloy wheels and Shimano XT/SLX deliver dependability for days. Simply, the Decoy SN is light enough to be fun but tough enough to ride every day. (*yt-industries.com*)—*TM*

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

GEAR

FAT BIKES

Norco Bigfoot VLT A1 $7,148

The Norco Bigfoot VLT is an absolute unit of a bike. With 100 mm of travel up front and 27.5 x 4.5 tires, there's not much this bike can't roll over. Coupled with a Shimano EP8 mid-drive motor and a battery as large as 900 Wh (540-Wh and 720-Wh models are available at lower cost, but provide less range), you can get the most of your winter riding. The Bigfoot VLT's progressive geometry makes for confident, stable descents. A 12-speed Shimano Deore XT/SLX mix drivetrain and TranzX dropper will let you tackle a range of trails. (*norco.com*)

Panorama Torngat Ti $5,729

The Panorama Torngat Ti is a fat bike you can modify for year-round riding. With adjustable Q-factor and dropouts, you can run a fat setup for the winter with up to 27.5 x 4.5 tires. Then, swap to the narrow Q-factor setting to run a more traditional mountain bike tire in the summer. All that comes on a sweet titanium frame. Available in small, medium or large, you can buy just the frame or a complete bike with a few options when it comes to spec, such as the Shimano XT/SLX model shown here. With mounting points everywhere, Torngat Ti is a great machine for bikepacking as well. (*panoramacycles.com*)

Spherik SF6 $2,500

The Spherik SF6 has everything you need in a price-point fat bike. The fully rigid aluminum frame and carbon fork comes equipped with hydraulic disc brakes and a TranzX dropper seat post, both offering you control on descents. A 1 x 12 Shimano Deore drivetrain with 11–50 tooth cassette is nice to see with its reliable shifting with ergonomic controls. The Race Face Ride 35 bar and stem round out the build. (*spherikbike.com*)—*JB*

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

GEAR

MOUNTAIN BIKE WHEELS

A

FSA **KFX i28** $3,115 A

FSA's new flagship XC wheelset sports an updated look thanks to the variable rim depth, ranging from 22 mm to 24 mm along each spoke hole. The design allows builders to fine-tune the wheels for compliance and ride feel. The 1,566-g set also features wider rims, but not quite what has seemingly become the industry standard at 30-mm internal, but a slim 28 mm instead, perfectly suitable for 2.4"-wide tires. The updated PRS hub features a 72-tooth ratchet for quick engagement and that familiar buzz. (*fsaproshop.com*)

B

Syncros **Revelstoke 1.0s** $3,199 B

The Revelstoke 1.0s set has shed considerable rim depth and weight from its previous version, now tipping the scales at 1,500 g even. The trail rims with 30-mm internal width are laced to DT Swiss 240s hubs, available in 28-hole for Center Lock rotors. The redesigned rim is also deployed on the Revelstoke 1.0 for less money—but expect to trade in your 240s for DT 370 hubs, and in-house spokes instead of DT Aerolite, an addition of 150 g. (*syncros.com*)

C

D

Nobl **TR35** $2,230 C

The TR35 are decidedly downcountry with their mismatched rim widths (30.5 mm front, 29.5 mm rear) in search of the balance between XC and trail demands. Cumberland, B.C.-based Nobl opted for DT Swiss 240 EXP hubs and Sapim D-light spokes thread into red Sapim alloy nipples, which is a nice touch. Expected weight before tape and tubeless valves is 1,505 g, and don't worry—Nobl installs that stuff before they ship, just add tires and sealant. (*noblwheels.com*)

Hunt **Proven Carbon Trail H_Core MTB 29** $2,186 D

Hunt, marking its 10th anniversary this year, has released the Proven Trail H_Core wheels—true 29" all-arounders appropriate for a variety of mountain bikes. The big upgrade is the H_Core, a proprietary carbon ring or insert added to the junction of the rim bed and each sidewall designed to add strength where the wheel needs it most. The front rim is wider at 31 mm (30-mm rear) and uses a thinner triple-butted spoke than the back to maximize ride feel. A 90-tooth ratchet system with six pawls offers incredibly fast engagement. The set weighs 1,732 g. (*huntbikewheels.com*)—*JW*

MTB

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

GEAR

MOUNTAIN BIKE TIRES

ASPEN
29X2.40WT
120 TPI
maxx speed
EXO
TR
TUBELESS READY

RSL
GUNNISON

SCHWALBE ALBERT TRAIL
PRO — TLR — RADIAL
ULTRA SOFT
29 x 2.50

Maxxis **Aspen** $130

The Maxxis Aspen is a top-tier cross country race tire designed for speed and control. Its low tread in the centre minimizes rolling resistance, while pronounced side knobs offer reliable cornering traction. This 29 x 2.4 model uses the company's MaxxSpeed compound with silica, as well as a 120 t.p.i. casing that keeps the tire supple. EXO sidewall protection adds durability against punctures and abrasions. The Wide Trail (WT) size is optimized for 30-mm inner width rims. You can use the Aspen as a front and rear tire. It's ideal for dry to mixed XC trail conditions. (*maxxis.com*)

Bontrager **Gunnison RSL XT** $95

The 29 x 2.4 Bontrager Gunnison RSL XT is a versatile trail tire offering a balance of durability, grip and speed. Available in black or black with tan sidewalls, the tire features a 120 t.p.i. casing with bead-to-bead protection, as well as inserts to prevent pinch flats. The triple-compound tread uses a firm base for rolling speed, a medium centre tread for braking and climbing traction and soft side knobs for cornering grip. Tubeless-ready and ultra-tacky, this is a great all-around tire choice for mixed trail conditions. (*trekbikes.com*)

Schwalbe **Albert Trail Pro** $160

This 29 x 2.5 Albert uses Schwalbe's radial technology. Instead of having carcass threads running at a 45-degree angle from bead to bead, the Albert's threads have a higher angle—not the 90 degrees of a car tire, but as high as Schwalbe could go without having to add a centre belt. This radial construction gives you a larger contact patch on the trail so the tire can conform to the terrain for enhanced grip, comfort and control. This Trail Pro model uses the Addix Ultra Soft compound, which is grippier than Addix Soft. Opt for Addix Soft if you want a longer-lasting tread. (*schwalbetires.com*)—*DD*

Photos: Hiep Vu

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

GEAR

MOUNTAIN BIKE SHOES

MTB

Trek **RSL Mountain** $600

Not all mountain bike shoes are created equal; the Trek RSL is an unapologetic race-ready shoe engineered for optimal power transfer and minimal weight. Available in sizes from 36 to 48, the RSL Mountain feature Trek's stiffest and lightest OCLV Carbon plate for maximum pedalling efficiency. The dual Boa fit system provides secure fit, while the MetNet relief zones in the upper add comfort. A Tachyon rubber outsole with removable toe and heel spikes ensures excellent traction on any surface. The GnarGuard coating protects against trail debris. If you want the best of everything on race day, these are the shoes for you. (*trekbikes.com*)

Giro **Chamber III** $280

The Giro Chamber III is a high-performance SPD-compatible mountain bike shoe designed for downhill trail riding. Lighter and slimmer than previous versions, the Chamber III offers a blend of pedalling power and walkability. The microfibre upper and low-bulk tongue provide a comfortable, locked-in feel. The secure hook-and-loop strap and laces ensure a customizable fit, while the Giro's Sensor rubber outsole balances grip and durability. Weighing 480 g per shoe, the Chamber III is available in men's performance fit sizes from 36 to 48, including half sizes from 42.5 to 45.5. (*ogc.ca*)

Leatt **Proclip 8.0 Endurance** $330

The Leatt ProClip 8.0 Endurance is a high-performance shoe designed for XC and gravel racing. It has a lightweight and durable RipStop upper with a carbon-injected sole providing stiffness for efficient power transfer. The RideGrip rubber outsole with a serious tread pattern ensures traction for off-bike movement. Each ProClip shoe has an extended cleat slot for a wide range of adjustment. The lacing system with Moz dial and D-rings automatically adjusts to various instep heights for a personalized fit. Two included sets of insoles accommodate different foot shapes. The Leatt ProClip 8.0 Endurance shoes are built for performance at a good price. (*leatt.com*)—*DD*

Photos: Hiep Vu

GRAVEL

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

GEAR

GRAVEL SHOES

Specialized **S-Works Recon** $550

The S-Works Recon is Specialized's high-end gravel shoe, but it wouldn't be out of place on a XC course. You might even be able to sneak into the road ride with them as they have a very roadie vibe to their look. There's a lot of tech in these shoes. Specialized aims to keep your feet at their most natural angle with a built-in wedge that improves the alignment of your knees and hips as you pedal. That alignment leads to more power. The Recons come with shims that help you to set the best shoe-to-pedal connection, which will boost your performance and comfort as you cruise along rough surfaces. The pair weigh 560 g. (*specialized.com*)

Fizik **Vento Proxy** $340

The Vento Proxy is a race shoe that's ideal for gravel's high summer season. The laminate mesh on the uppers make the shoes quite breathable, a top feature when you're in the middle of a hot jam session. Yet, the uppers are quite durable, too. The outsole is Fizik's X3, which is carbon reinforced with nylon, a stiff formula for excellent power transfer to the pedals. Each shoe only has one Boa closure, a design that makes for speedy entry and exit, and fewer adjustments for you to make as you're setting up for the sprint. (*fizik.com*)—*MP*

Photos: Hiep Vu

2025
BUYER'S
GUIDE

GEAR

MTB AND GRAVEL PEDALS

GRAVEL+MTB

Shimano **XTR XC PD-M9100** $260

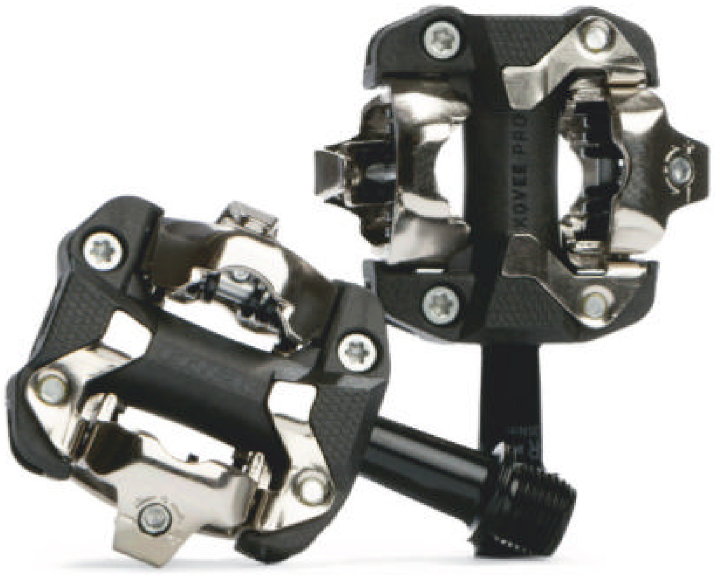
The XTR PD-M9100 is the *crème de la crème* of XC and CX pedals. Weighing in at a feathery 314 g per pair, this set is designed to get you across the finish line with as little fuss as possible. A wider pedal body plate offers plenty of room for shoe-pedal contact, ensuring a solid connection with your bike. The open-body sheds mud, so staying clipped in, or clipping in after a muddy run-up, is easier. The low height cuts down on pedal strikes. The combination of chromoly axle and sealed bearings equal durability. There's even a version with axles 3-mm shorter for riders looking to keep their Q-factors tight. (*ridecanada.shimano.com*)

Trek **Kovee Pro** $200

The Trek Kovee pedals are a great option if you're looking for an alternative to some of the other pedal brands on the market. Trek went with a carbon body on these race-oriented pedals to keep weight down to a very respectable 336 g, while spec'ing dual-sealed ball bearings with chromoly spindles for strength and durability. As you'd expect, entry and release tension adjustment are built into the Kovee Pros. The pedals have a distinctive look that will appeal to a lot of riders—regardless of whether they're riding Trek bikes. The Kovees offer 7 degrees of float and are SPD-compatible. (*trekbikes.com*)

Garmin **Rally XC200** $1,620

The Garmin Rally XC200 incorporates a dual-sensing power meter that measures power output (wattage) on every pedal stroke. The XC200s also calculate time spent seated or standing, cadence, where in the pedal stroke you're producing power, and left/right leg balance. All the data is displayed on your Garmin computer or the Garmin Connect app. Serious cyclists will be able to analyse their output and performance, and train more efficiently. Battery life is a claimed 120 hours, so you'll be good to go for months. The price is eye-watering, but it may be worth it for a top podium spot. (*garmin.com*)



OneUp **Clip** $219

OneUp Components is upping their component game with the new Clip pedals, which are said to be light enough for XC riding but still DH-worthy. The 410 g, ultra-thin pedals boast a revamped retention system that works in conjunction with a large platform and four set-screws per side—all of which means more shoe contact. The SPD-compatible Clip provides 5 degrees of float and a 12 degree release angle for a secure, connected feeling. The pedals offer more spring tension adjustment than Shimano pedals, removable pins and cleat spacers to fine tune fit. Bonus—they're available in eight anodized colours. (*oneupcomponents.com*)—*Stuart Kernaghan*

Photos: Hiep Vu

ROAD

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

GEAR

ROAD SHOES

Giro **Empire SLX II** $600

Giro's Empire SLX II is the go-to shoe for long hot summer days in the saddle. The upper is made from Giro's proprietary knitted Synchwire bonded to a thermoplastic-polyurethane skin for reinforced durability. This construction allows for a shoe that is practically all ventilation. The Empire is slightly heavier than its predecessor, but at 195 g per shoe, who's complaining? Laces keep you locked in along with a redesigned and stiffer carbon sole. Available in black or white. (*ogc.ca*)

Shimano **RC703** $359

Shimano's RC 703 is the "Ultegra for shoes," featuring plenty of trickle-down technology from the company's top-tier S-Phyre. Returning features from the 702 include dual L6Z boa dials, a wrapping upper and a sole with a 10 out of 12 stiffness rating. The 703 comes with updated lace guides and even cleaner esthetics. Completely black or white models will make colour co-ordination with your socks easy, but sage green would bring some variety to your group ride. (*ridecanada.shimano.com*)—*JW*

Photos: Hiep Vu

ROAD PEDALS

Favero **Assioma Duo** $884

The "Duo" in the Favero Assioma Duo's name means that it calculates data for both pedals. Favero says the Assioma is different from other power meters because it factors in variables such as irregular pedalling caused by sprints and hill climbs, or the use of oval chainrings. The system uses both Bluetooth and ANT+ connectivity, and can pair with smartphones as well as bike computers. Rechargeable battery life is claimed to be 50 hours. Weight for a pair of Assioma pedals is a very respectable 303 g. You'll need to use Look or Favero cleats. (*cycling.favero.com*)

Shimano **Dura-Ace PD-R9100** $400

Shimano's Dura-Ace pedal is a top-shelf offering for serious road cyclists. The injection-moulded carbon body is super light at only 228 g per pair and stiff, meaning efficient power transfer. The extra-wide platform provides a solid pedal/cleat connection, while wide bearing placement ensures smooth and stable operation for many hard miles. Entry and release tension are adjustable to suit your preference. The pedals come with SPD-SL blue cleats so you're good to go right out of the box. Riders with larger feet or knee issues should check out the version with axles that are 4-mm longer, which will provide added frame clearance. (*ridecanada.shimano.com*)

Look **Keo Classic 3** $95

As the originator of the modern clipless pedal, Look knows a few things about designing quality platforms. The Keo Classic 3 is part of Look's Road Comfort series, which is aimed at recreational cyclists who want a reliable pedal without all the bells and whistles—or hefty price tag. This pedal sports a composite body to keep weight down to 280 g per pair, as well as an adjustable release tension. The Classic 3 should be a serious contender for new riders looking to try out clipless pedals for the first time. (*hlc.bike*)—*SK*

ROAD

Photos: Hiep Vu

ROAD+GRAVEL+MTB

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

GEAR

SADDLES

PRO **Sirin Team** $335

The PRO Sirin Team saddle has a women's-specific design for your maximum comfort on the bike. The saddle has a narrower width and softer density materials at the nose so that you can ride in comfort, no matter how far you're going. There is also a central channel with soft edges that has been optimized to suit female riders. The back of the saddle is firmer and slightly raised to provide support. The Sirin Team comes in 152-mm and 162-mm widths. (*pro-bikegear.com*)

Syncros **Celista V 1.0** $250

If you're a road cyclist who prefers a lightweight performance saddle that puts you in an aggressive race position, then the Syncros Celista V 1.0 will work for you. The aggressive position means you'll need to be flexible to get the most out of it. This saddle is made with polyurethane foam and has a central cut-out so that you stay comfortable even in an aerodynamic position. The carbon reinforced shell and carbon rails make it so that the saddle weighs in at a light 190 g. (*syncros.com*)

Fizik **Terra Aidon X3** $220

The short-nosed Terra Aidon X3 saddle is made with full-suspension eMTB riders in mind. The shorter length puts you in a stable position, giving you more control and confidence for navigating technical trails on a heavier eMTB. The saddle uses Fizik's Type 2 foam to keep you comfortable on long climbs, as well as an inner channel to relieve pressure. Fizik's Wingflex technology makes sure the saddle's edges are as unobtrusive as possible as you're pedalling. The Terra Aidon X3 is available 145-mm and 160-mm widths, which weigh 249 g and 259 g, respectively. (*fizik.com*)—*HM*

Photos: Hiep Vu

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

GEAR

BIKE COMPUTERS

0:01:06
53%
10:32
PAUSE
2 km
1 km
SPEED
76m
Wiltshire Avenue
HAMMERHEAD

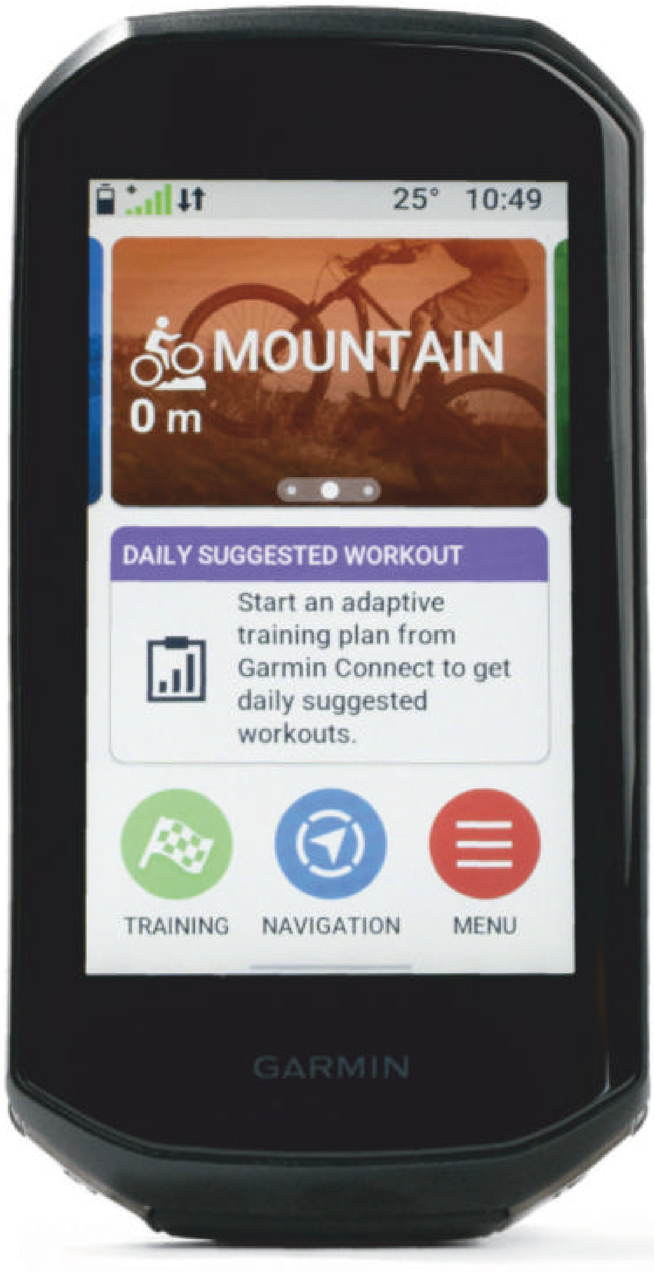
DURA
200 m
10:22AM
Start
Navigation
Activity Alert

Coros **Dura** $399

Coros says its Dura computer, with colour touchscreen, can run for 120 hours. That figure is sure to assuage any battery anxiety on a long ride. If you're riding in sunlight, more life will get added to the computer via solar charging. On roads, the Dura uses Google Maps for rerouting and road conditions. Both electronic Shimano or SRAM groupsets integrate well with the head unit. To take your data collection to the next level, you can work Coros's Pace Pro watch into the mix. The watch lets you track sleep and heart-rate variability. Information from the watch and head unit can all be analyzed in Coros's app. (*ca.coros.com*)

Hammerhead **Karoo** $700

If you have a few bikes, each with its own set of gizmos, then you'll appreciate the Hammerhead Karoo's ability to set up profiles for device combinations. The head unit has both a touchscreen and buttons for navigating menus and making selections. That may seem a bit extra, but the convenience of a touchscreen in high, dry summer disappears really quickly in the mud and rain of fall, or mud and rain of spring. The Karoo's audio alerts are crazy loud, which you might need if your freehub puts out serious decibels. Still, the display is crisp, and the data screens are nicely customizable on this high-performance computer. (*hammerhead.io*)


25°
10:49
MOUNTAIN
0 m
DAILY SUGGESTED WORKOUT
Start an adaptive training plan from Garmin Connect to get daily suggested workouts.
TRAINING
NAVIGATION
MENU
GARMIN

Garmin **Edge 1050** $980

When you navigate the menus of the Garmin Edge 1050, you'll notice how quickly it responds. It's truly speedy. It's also big: 60.2 x 118.5 x 16.3 mm. If you're upgrading to the 1050 and you have a proprietary mount on your bike—well, you might have to make another upgrade. The screen's brightness is excellent, but it comes at a price: battery life. Garmin says the computer will run for 20 hours, or 60 in battery-saver mode. If you want a longer-running computer from Garmin, the 1040 Solar would be a better choice. A cool feature of the 1050: a bell. For real, it has a bell function. If your electronic groupset has accessory buttons, you can program one of them to go *ring-ring*. (*garmin.com*)—*MP*

Photos: Hiep Vu

GRAVEL+MTB

2025 BUYER'S GUIDE

GEAR

DROPPER POSTS

PRO **Tharsis** $500

Designed for cross country or endurance riding, PRO's updated Tharsis dropper post delivers 100 mm of travel in a lightweight package. With three post-diameter options—27.2 mm, 30.9 mm (which is $40 cheaper than the other models) and 31.6 mm—PRO's definition of "endurance" could easily include gravel biking as well as options for most mountain bikes. All models use titanium bolts. AL7050 alloy keeps the internally routed Tharsis lighter than 500 g for all diameters, with the 27.2-mm post mixing in AL6061 lower to drop its mass to 417 g. Tharsis now uses a secure two-bolt saddle clamp and oval-shaped internals to make sure up and down are the only directions this post moves. (*pro-bikegear.com*)

Fox **Transfer Performance Elite** $389

Fox overhauled the Transfer dropper post for 2025 to have lower-stack and longer-travel options. The Transfer line now runs five lengths, from 120 mm all the way to a massive 240-mm drop, adjustable in 5-mm increments (up to 25 mm) so you can get the most travel out of your frame. Fox also completely redesigned the Transfer's internals to improve durability, making for reliable, and adjustable, return speed and continues to offer the post in all three standard diameters (30.9, 31.6, 34.9). (*ca.ridefox.com*)

PNW **Range** $230

PNW offers several dropper posts with the Range being its most price-conscious internally-routed option. Value doesn't come at the cost of performance, though, as PNW uses a simple sealed-cartridge design for reliability. Robust, made for the West Coast all-weather abuse of its Washington home, easy to install and affordable, the post comes in 30.9-mm or 31.6-mm diameters and four travel options—125 mm, 150 mm, 170 mm and 200 mm. The Range is $230 for just the post or $288 with a Range lever, cable and housing. Upgrade to the Loam dropper for a shorter overall post length and 25 mm of travel adjustment. (*pnwcomponents.ca*)—*TM*

MTB FORKS

Fox 38 Factory Grip X2 $1,669

When Fox revitalized its fork lineup for its 50th anniversary, the Grip X2 damper was the centrepiece. Aimed at refining the brand's more gravity-focused forks, the new damper goes for a mix of traction and the support needed for big hits and high-speed riding. With the burly 38 coming in 160, 170 or 180 mm of travel, the Grip X2 is the perfect fit. All Fox's usual tech comes along for the ride, including high- and low-speed adjustment for compression and rebound, bypass channels and bleed ports to keep the fork feeling smooth. Of course, Fox's iconic Kashima coating is on this Factory model. You can spring for an optional bolt-on mudguard, too. (*ca.ridefox.com*)

Öhlins RXF36 M.3 $2,100

Swedish suspension gurus Öhlins bring decades of high-end and race-development experience across motorsports to its mountain bike range. The new RXF36 M.3 increases bushing overlap in the fork for more sensitivity and better traction. It also uses the TTX18 damper developed from the brand's downhill fork for ultimate gravity performance. The RXF36 M.3 is highly adjustable with Öhlins's twin-piston, three-chamber air-spring system, and available in a range of travel and offsets. There's a model for 27.5" and 29" wheels. You can even switch to coil. This is the top end of race-focused suspension. (*ogc.ca*)

RockShox SID Ultimate Flight Attendant $2,110

RockShox developed the Flight Attendant electronic system to let the suspension do the thinking so you can focus on the trail ahead and the race developing around you. The AXS battery-powered Charger Race Day 2 F.A. damper automatically switches between three compression settings (open, pedal and lock) based on what you're riding for instant efficiency. SID Ultimate Flight Attendant is 29" only. Its 35-mm stanchions mix XC race weights with trail-bike toughness, while the DebonAir+ spring keeps the SID's 110- or 120-mm travel feeling smooth. Experience the future of electronic suspension technology today. (*rockshox.com*)—TM

MTB

DESTINATION

FINLAND

The Gravel Routes of Lapland Under the Northern Lights

North of the Arctic Circle is a playground of mix-surface riding

story and photos by **Martin Bissig**

Our base was the small Finnish town of Levi, about 180 km north of the Arctic Circle. From October to April, this place is a winter sports hub. In late autumn, it felt deserted. The weather forecast, however, promised ideal conditions for a gravel biking exploration with Caro and Anita Gehrig, the Swiss enduro riding twin sisters. Since opening their own hotel in 2022, they've cut back on racing. "Now we have more time for cool projects like this," Caro said. Multi-day rides covering hundreds of kilometres are nothing new for these former pros. I didn't have to do much convincing to get them on board with my plan to explore northern Finland on gravel bikes.

Lapland: Made for gravel bikes

Our first loop started in Yllas, south of Levi. The trails are used by hikers and riders in the warmer months and cross-country skiers in the winter. We climbed steadily on the wide, rugged paths up to the highest point. From just below 400 m above sea level, we had a perfect view of the area. The nearest ski resort rose a few hundred metres higher, standing out against the flat landscape. Forests stretched to the horizon with only occasional signs of civilization in the form of log cabins or small villages.

We switched from wide gravel paths to narrow singletrack winding through the forest. "Now I get why blueberry juice is Finnair's signature drink," Anita said. She had parked her bike against a tree and was crouched down, munching on blueberries. We couldn't stop for long as daylight runs out quickly at that latitude in fall. We wanted to reach a lakeside fire pit in the national park by nightfall. Riding on sandy trails, we arrived at the beach as the last rays of sunlight filtered through the yellow-brown leaves. We couldn't have picked a better spot to cook our salmon over an open fire.

As darkness fell, Anita asked, "Do you think we'll see the northern lights tonight?" With clouds moving in, the chances weren't great, but we still had a few nights ahead of us.

Downhill trails on gravel bikes

Levi has one of the northernmost bike parks in the world. The trail crew invited us to try it on downhill bikes, but the sisters politely declined. "If it's doable on downhill bikes, it should be doable on gravel bikes too," they suggested back in Switzerland. So, we left the full-face helmets behind and hit the Santa Cabin Trail on skinny tires with bikepacking bags. The former enduro pros found that the well-maintained trail was totally manageable without suspension. A few steep berms and wooden ramps later, we came across an old hut, which had starred in a famous Finnish Christmas movie long before the nearby bike park jumps were built. "This is exactly how I pictured Finland," Caro said, snapping a photo of her sister in front of the hut.

From sauna to shaman

A sauna visit is a must in Finland. There are more than half as many saunas in the country as there are people, which means not only does every household have one, but so does every forest hut and holiday cabin by a lake or river. Saunas are for social gatherings, like a trip to

the beach or pool.

After a dip in the crystal-clear lake, we were rejuvenated and ready for a spiritual encounter. A Sámi shaman welcomed us into a fire-warmed cabin. He was a little imposing, but mostly captivating, as he shared stories of his ancestors. We learned about his life as a fisherman and hunter and heard the legend of how the northern lights came to be.

"When a giant fox prowls through the polar winter forest," the shaman said, "its tail sweeps side to side. The sparks it creates fly into the sky and appear as the northern lights, which we call fox fire. If you'd like, I can call upon the spirits and try to wake the fox."

"Absolutely. Let's go outside and see if it works," Anita said. The shaman drummed and murmured. A few minutes later, we stepped out into the night and stared at the sky. What initially looked like a veil of clouds revealed itself in the deepening dark as a faint aurora. Not especially bright, but there.

"Must be a little fox," Caro said with a laugh. We hoped larger foxes would be out in the nights to come.

Packrafting the right way

The following days were spent seeking out the best gravel trails. Aapo, our guide and friend, shared some of his favourite routes. We didn't mind the occasional hike-a-bike section if it meant uncovering gems that likely haven't seen many gravel tires. We crossed bridges and

> *"Riding on sandy trails, we arrived at the beach as the last rays of sunlight filtered through the leaves."*

Anfibio
PACKRAFTING GEAR

passed deep blue lakes, even wading barefoot through knee-deep streams at times.

"There's probably no better place to combine packrafting with biking," Aapo told us. Rather than riding around a medium-sized lake, we decided to paddle across. Before the kayaks were inflated, each one was about as big as a small sleeping bag, perfect for land-and-water adventures. After dismantling the bikes and securing them with straps, we were ready to set sail. The kayaks were such a hit that the next day, we paddled 10 km downstream and rode back to our cabin.

The fox fire burns bright

My aurora borealis app forecasted an excellent chance of seeing northern lights on our final evening. A clear sky and high solar storm activity created ideal conditions. After our last dinner together, we kept our eyes glued to the night sky. A faint green glow appeared. We drove to the highest, darkest point in the area: the summit of Levi's ski resort. Sure enough, as the night deepened, the lights began to dance. Although it wasn't my first time seeing the aurora, the spectacle never loses its magic. We couldn't have asked for a better end to our gravel adventure. The Gehrig twins' wish to see the northern lights for the first time had come true. Whether it was thanks to the shaman's magic words is up for debate. But one thing's for sure: Finland had cast its spell on us. The rugged nature, endless trails, welcoming people, and—last but not least—excellent reindeer steaks make it a place worth visiting had the northern lights blazed or had the giant fox stayed in its den.

Levi
Helsinki

Details

How to get there

The region is accessible via airports in Kittilä, Rovaniemi and Ivalo. From there, you can get to Levi by bus or rental car. International flights usually connect through Helsinki.

Finding the best time to visit

The ideal months for gravel biking adventures are June through September. Temperatures are pleasant, though there are many mosquitoes from June to mid-August. Northern lights sightings are more likely from September onward, when the temperatures are cooler.

Knowing the climate

Lapland has a subarctic climate with short, mild summers and long, cold winters. In autumn, daytime temperatures often range from 3 to 15 C.

Money matters

Finland uses the euro. Card payments are widespread, even in remote areas. Things are a bit more expensive in Finland when compared with other European countries. Expect to budget around 100–150 euros per day for accommodation, food and activities.

Mathias Guillemette

From the velodrome to the road with Tudor Pro Cycling

STATS	
Lives	Girona, Spain
Born	Jan. 14, 2002
Hometown	Trois-Rivières, Que.
Team	Tudor Pro Cycling Devo
Bikes	BMC Teammachine R 01 road bike, BMC Timemachine time trial bike

by **Matthew Ploro**

On **Jan. 1, track rider Mathias Guillemette** began a new phase of his cycling career. He'd spent years racing endurance events in Nations Cups and the Track Champions League. He'd ridden on the national team pursuit squad, coached by Laura Brown, with riders such as Dylan Bibic, Carson Mattern and Michael Folley. This past summer, they were all on the boards of the Vélodrome National de Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, competing in the track events of the Paris Olympics. But now, Guillemette will be racing on the road. At the start of the year, Tudor Pro Cycling, the Switzerland-based ProTeam, announced that he was on the roster for its development squad. This season, Guillemette wants to see just how far he can go racing on the roads of Europe.

How did you connect with Tudor?
It started actually at the Olympic Games. I was talking with Laura Brown about how we could get me on a good cycling team. Derek Gee, who was in Paris for the road events, happened to be at the table, as well. I was talking about Tudor and how it had a track rider, so for sure they have knowledge of how good track riders can be on the road. Derek remembered that Tudor's head of innovation worked at the Milton velodrome for the national team as a sports scientist. And Laura knew him, too. It was kind of a dream scenario when she just sent an email, you know, sent my power data. The team thought about it, and then they called me and said they'd probably put me on the development team for one year.

When did you get the news that you'd be on the team?
Three weeks before the track world championships, so in September.

You are 23. You're on a development team. I have seen other teams put riders who are older on devo teams just to be able to work them into some top-level races. Do you have any sense of what your role will be as the senior rider on the under-23 team?
Some of the guys are four years younger than me, so I can definitely teach them a thing or two about, you know, washing their dishes or washing their clothes. But I'm here to get back in the pack on the road. My calendar is racing roughly 50/50 with the pro team and with the devo team. When I'm with the devo team, half the time I'm the main sprinter and some of the younger guys are working for me. At other races, I'm the main lead-out guy. Maybe they can teach me things and maybe I can teach them a little.

Around June, I'll start racing with the pros. There I'm really just doing lead-outs and sprint support. It's really the job I want to do, and I want to explore, so I'm really looking forward to that. The calendar will allow me to get the road rhythm back in the first few months. The race miles will get me ready to race harder and harder.

On the track, you're an endurance rider. On the road, you're focused on sprints. Can you tell me more about the connection between your track abilities and your skills on the road?
Track endurance races are long for the track, but compared with the road, they are very short races. Even the madison would be maybe one third of a road race, so it's not that much. Fifty minutes is quite short for any pro cyclist. On the road, my profile is definitely a pure sprinter and, if I lose weight, maybe a puncher.

Is there anything that has surprised you about working with Tudor?
The organization. They plan all the little things. They have a website where it tells you your next trip. Your plane ticket is right there. It tells you who will pick you up at the airport. You have your coaches in your inbox every day, just asking how training went. They'll say things like, "Oh, your heart rate was a little high at that point in your ride."

That all makes me think about stereotypes of Swiss efficiency.
Yeah, I mean, even at the training camps, everything is so dialed. You can't just put your bag in one car without telling anyone because for sure somebody put on a spreadsheet somewhere that your bag has to be in a specific compartment in that car. When in doubt, you look at the spreadsheet.

Photos: Courtesy Tudor Cycling

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